Art Garfunkel | Langhorne Slim | STS9 | Yusuf/Cat Stevens | moe.

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MGMT
Time to Pretend (Once Again)

LUKAS NELSON
Promise of the Prodigal Son

I'M WITH HER (AND HER AND HER)
Sara Watkins, Sarah Jarosz and Aoife O'Donovan

+

Vance Joy

Jackie Greene

Khruangbin
Brewing Up A Storm with Kyle Hollingsworth & SweetWater

SOJA
The Grateful Dead Meet Marvel

Beck

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ISSUE 285
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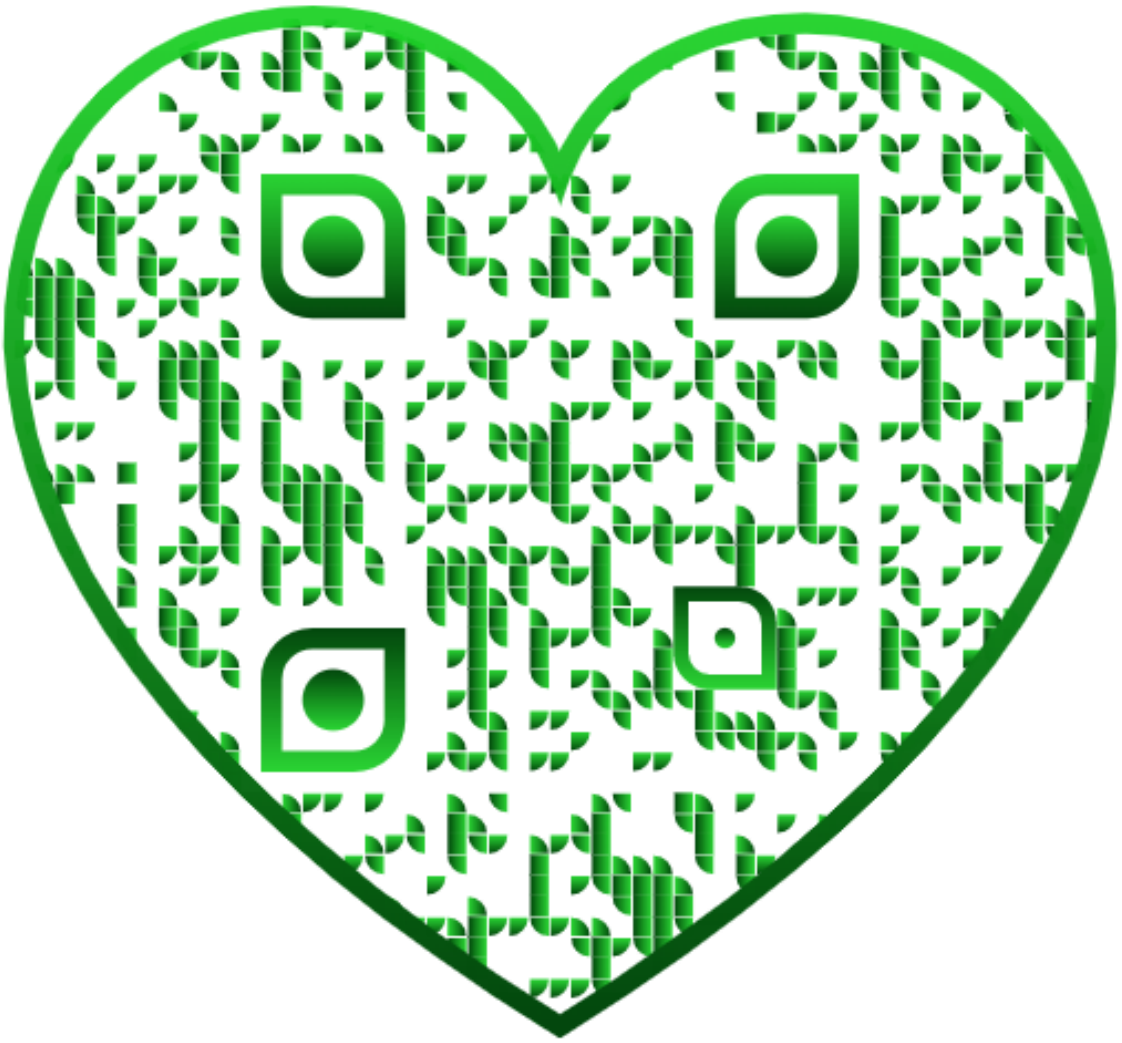

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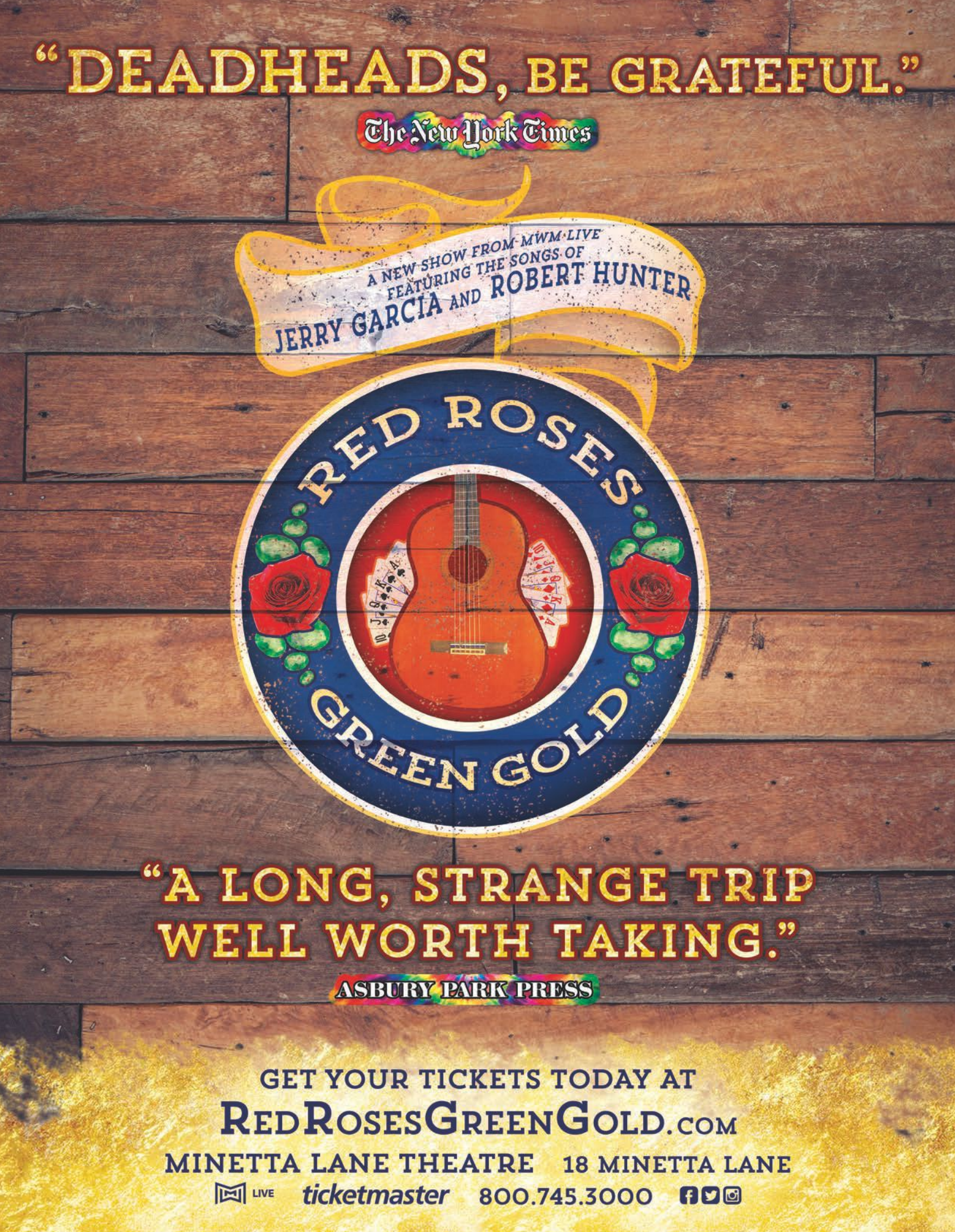
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V45 NO1

ONE OF THE THINGS I've always loved about *Relix* is that while "It's about the music," it's not exclusively about what's happening onstage or in the studio. We're keen to report on profound sounds from a variety of angles and perspectives.

This issue once again takes an expansive view, not only through our regular sections like Behind the Scene and Soapbox, but also through our stories on the collaborative beer we're brewing with Kyle Hollingsworth and SweetWater, and a look at the relationship between the Grateful Dead and Marvel Comics.

Over the past few years, I've often used the Editor's Note to share ideas or information prompted by the current issue's content. In this case it's comics. While digging in and researching Marvel's relationship with music, I came across some fascinating guest appearances and references that I'd like to offer up now for your edification and future exploration. I thank Kurtis Findlay of the *Epic Marvel Podcast* and the good folks on the Marvel Masterworks message board for their assistance.

Strange Tales
#130 (MARCH 1965):
Johnny Storm (The Human Torch) and Ben Grimm (The Thing) take dates to a Beatles concert in Manhattan, but the heroes miss the show when they chase criminals who steal the box-office receipts.

Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.,
#15 (NOVEMBER 1969):
Nick Fury attends a Country Joe and the Fish concert in Central Park where he is shot by a villain hoping to collect a $1 million bounty.

Avengers
#93 (NOVEMBER 1971):
Hank Pym enters The Vision and attempts to repair him with the aid of his trusty ants named Crosby, Stills and Nash.

***Howard the Duck* #13 (JUNE 1977):**
Howard's young friend Winda Wester uses her mind to materialize KISS.

***The Defenders* #59-60 (MAY-JUNE 1978):**
The superhero team battles Vera Gemini and Agents of Fortune, a reference to the Blue Öyster Cult's 1976 album *Agents of Fortune* (and, yes, the band members appear as demon lords).

***Marvel Premiere* #50 (OCTOBER 1979):**
This issue offers an interpretation of Alice Cooper's 1978 record *From the Inside*.

***Incredible Hulk* #271 (MAY 1982):**
Rocket Raccoon and Hulk embark on an adventure that is based on the Beatles song "Rocky Raccoon."

***Avengers* #239 (JANUARY 1984):**
The Beast, The Black Panther, Black Widow, Hawkeye, Mockingbird and Wonder Man appear on *Late Night With David Letterman*. Paul Shaffer and the World's Most Dangerous Band are in on the action as well.

***What If?* #41 (SEPTEMBER 1992):**
This issue provides the answer to something we've all wondered: "What if the Fantastic Four were led by Keith Richards instead of Reed Richards?"

***Eminem/The Punisher* #1 (MAY 2009):**
'Nuff Said.

***X-Men '92* #6 (AUGUST 2016):**
The X-Men are working security at Westchester's LILAPALOOZA, which features music from The Flaming Lips and the Toadies.

Intrigued by one (or more) of these? Marvel offers digital versions of their archival comics, so you can check them out. All of the comics pair nicely with Ground Score, the IPA we've created with Kyle and SweetWater Brewery. Oh, and as for your soundtrack, how about Kyle's new album *50*, which will be available, quite fittingly, on his 50th birthday, March 2.

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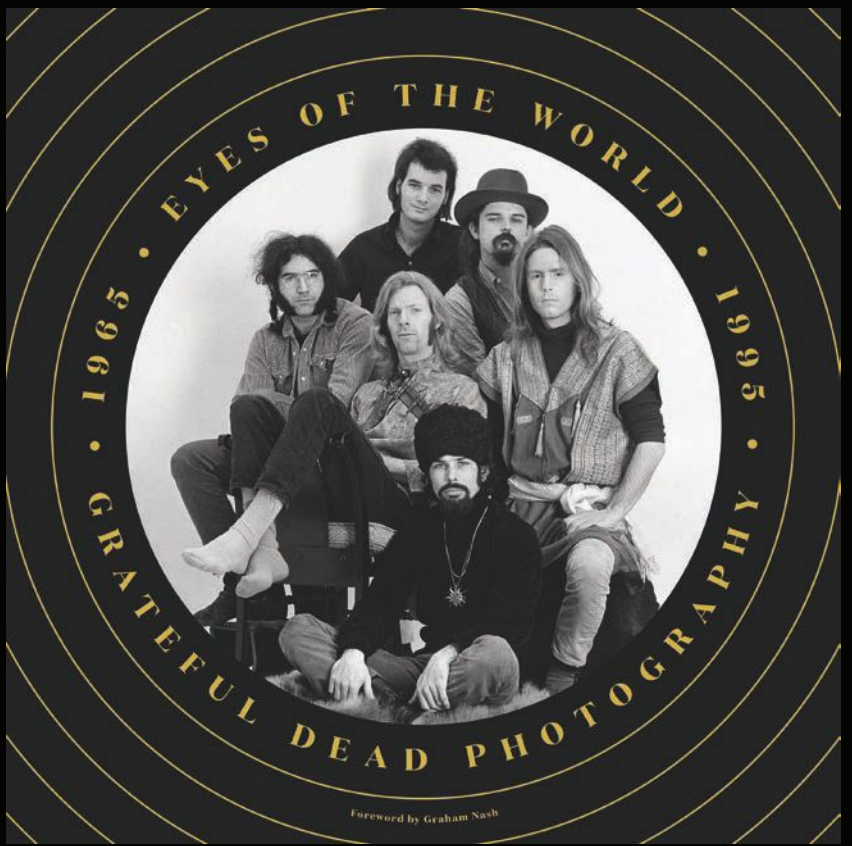
ON THE COVER

Kristen Welsh shot Beck.



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"A startling reminder of how good things can get with a touch of grace, some laughter and a lot of good luck. You can almost hear the joy in these images that only music can bring." **— MICKEY HART**

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The Buildup to the **Grateful Dead** at RFK Stadium in 1989, **Arlo Guthrie** on 50 years at Carnegie Hall

On Jambands.com:
Victor Wooten talks *TRYPNOTYX*, **Jeff Chimenti** finds Red Roses, Green Gold

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The story of *Relix*'s beer project with **Kyle Hollingsworth** and **SweetWater Brewery** continues as the pilot batch becomes available for tasting and we crowd source a name for our IPA.

38 | Sooner or Later, It All Gets Real BY JEFF TAMARKIN
Lukas Nelson was born into country royalty and earned his stripes shredding with Neil Young. Now, the 29-year-old guitarist and his band, **Promise of the Real**, have stepped out on their own with a major-label debut.

40 | Chasing the Eternal Sunrise BY BILL MURPHY
Khruangbin arrived out of nowhere two years ago, turning heads with a wholly original, cinematic Thai-funk sound. With their sophomore album, *Con Todo El Mundo*, the Texas trio are poised to bring their otherworldly mix of '60s-inspired surf-rock and psychedelia to the masses.

43 | Just Kids BY MIKE GREENHAUS
MGMT's major-label debut signified the rise of modern indie-pop—it was a shot heard around the world that inspired a generation of electro-bangers and psychedelic warriors, yet it left group co-founders **Ben Goldwasser** and **Andrew VanWyngarden** wary of their newfound fame. A decade later, the dynamic duo have reclaimed their classic sound for a different, darker age.

46 | Jackie Greene's Basement Tapes
BY RAFFAELA KENNY-CINCOTTA
Since he arrived on the scene, **Jackie Greene** has been described in many ways: Americana wunderkind, sensitive singer-songwriter sideman to the jamband stars and secret guitar shredder. But the California native recently fell into a role that even he never expected—New Yorker and basement recording artist. *The Modern Lives Vol. 1* is the result of Greene's marriage and recent cross-country move, and may be his most intimate release yet.

49 | We Three BY DEAN BUDNICK
Sara Watkins, **Sarah Jarosz** and **Aoife O'Donovan** first performed together as a trio though a spontaneous opportunity at the 2014 Telluride Bluegrass Festival. Three and a half years later, the musicians, who had known each other long before that initial appearance, are finally releasing their debut full-length record as **I'm With Her**.

52 | One of These Lives BY JUSTIN JACOBS
It's a good thing that **Vance Joy** didn't balk when Taylor Swift asked him to join the massive stadium run in support of her unstoppable *1989* album. Thanks to that run of opening dates and his own infectious single, the Australian-bred singer-songwriter may finally prove that sensitive indie-folk still has a place on the pop charts with his long-awaited new release, *Nation of Two*.

54 | Deep Hues BY RYAN REED
Three decades into a career that touched on anti-folk, indie-funk, alt-rock, hip-hop and the hyphenated space between those divergent genres, **Beck** still knows *where it's at*. And, with his Adele-indebted, Justin Bieber-referencing studio smash *Colors*, he may have finally crafted his career-defining album.

JOHN MCLAUGHLIN
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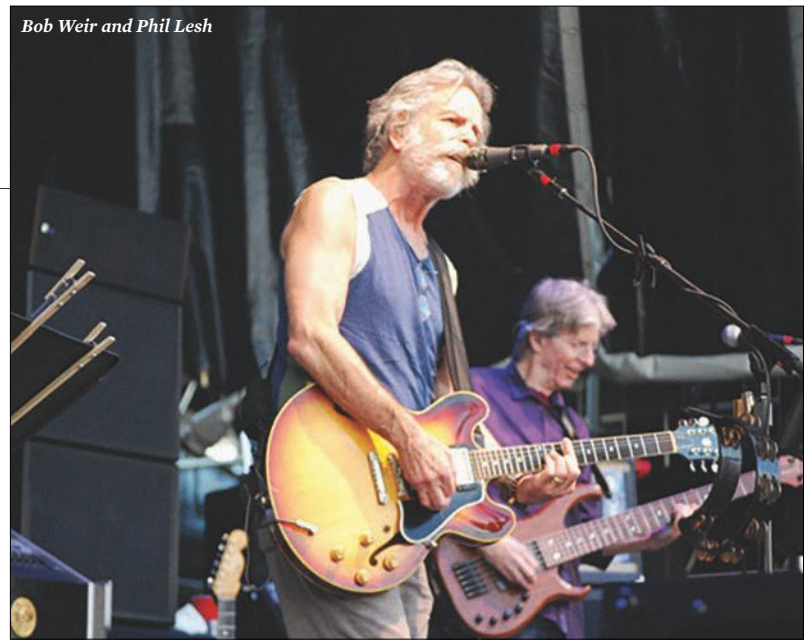
Here's what readers are talking about online and offline



Bob Weir and Phil Lesh

DEAR RELIX

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Send your thoughts to letters@relix.com.

INTRODUCING A DIFFERENT DUO

In early December, Bob Weir and Phil Lesh announced their first ever duo tour, presenting two sets in both acoustic and electric formats, along with some special guests. The old friends, who have only shared the stage a few times since 2015's Fare Thee Well, will play select shows in New York, Boston and Chicago in March—and, of course, our readers sounded off on the new combo.

Excited to hear what they put together. Hope guests include Kimock, Anastasio, Kadlecik, Mayer and Haynes.

Doug via Jambands.com

Love the old, love the new. It's all about the music and the feeling. Let Phil sing. I will enjoy and appreciate it all.

Dave Roberts via Facebook

DICKEY BETTS RETURNS

On his 74th birthday, Allman Brothers guitarist Dickey Betts announced a special return to the road. Betts quietly retired from touring three years ago, but he's seen an increase in offers since Gregg Allman's passing in May and a recent Rolling Stone *profile. For his upcoming dates, Betts will share lead guitar duties with his son Duane, a former member of Dawes who spent years touring with his dad in Great Southern.*

Mr. Betts, that's great news! Hope you're feeling good and ready to thrill us all once again. God bless you out on that road. *Lefty Coughlin via Facebook*

Hey, Dickey, if you are putting a band together, I would like to audition for second guitar. *Andy Beck via Facebook*

Dickey Betts with the classic Allman Brothers Band lineup

RECORD STORE PROFILE:
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With stores in Boston and Cambridge, Mass., as well as in Warren, R.I., In Your Ear has been the chief resource for the Northeastern vinyl lover since 1982. The Boston location, just steps from the Paradise Rock Club, features a deep collection of vinyl, CDs and cassettes, plus some rare 8-tracks in the mix.

FANS.COM PHOTO CONTEST

Jim James performing with My Morning Jacket at Arrington, Va.'s Lockn' on August 27, 2016. Photo by Dan Bird. Want to be published in *Relix*? Just upload an original photo from a live music event to *Relix*'s Fans.com Photo Contest app. Noted photographer Jay Blakesberg will select the winner from the group of 10 finalists that receives the most votes.

INSTAPRINT

■ Dead & Company's fall tour came to an abrupt halt when John Mayer (@john mayer) checked into the hospital for an emergency appendectomy shortly before the band's show in New Orleans. The remaining dates were rescheduled for early 2018. As always, Mayer resurfaced on social media, posting a photo of himself shortly after surgery with the caption: "still got it."

Dean Budnick (Weir and Lesh)

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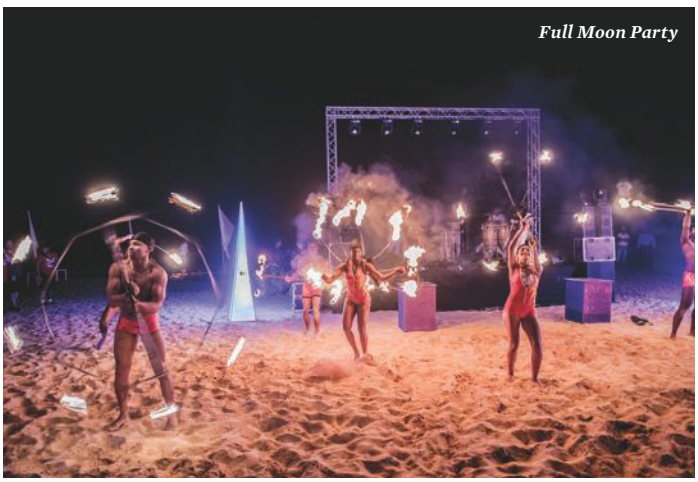
Full Moon Party

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DECEMBER 1–4, 2017

BY RAFFAELA KENNY-CINCOTTA // PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVE VANN

For a certain quadrant of the jamband community, **Dominican Holidaze** is always the best party of the year. The official kickoff of Cloud 9's main season, this installment of the annual destination event boasted three shows each by hosts **Umphrey's McGee**, **STS9** and **The Disco Biscuits**, along with sets from fellow improvisers **GRiZ**, **Lotus**, **Joe Russo's Almost Dead**, **SunSquabi**, **Wolf + Lamb**, **The Motet**, **Spafford** and **TAUK** on the sandy beaches of the Dominican Republic.

Umphrey's McGee played twice Friday, offering a rare cover of Ween's "The Grobe" within a "Similar Skin" jam (no doubt a wink to Ween bassist **Dave Dreiwitz** who was onsite with JRAD). Later, the prog-jammers dove into a deep, six-song second set that featured favorites like "Phil's Farm" and "Much Obliged," which contained references to Jimi Hendrix's "Voodoo Child." Umphrey's kept the rarities coming on Saturday afternoon, offering up Bob Marley's "Rainbow Country" for the first time since summer 2015. STS9 had some fun with their covers too, taking on Lorde's "Green Light" before "20-12."

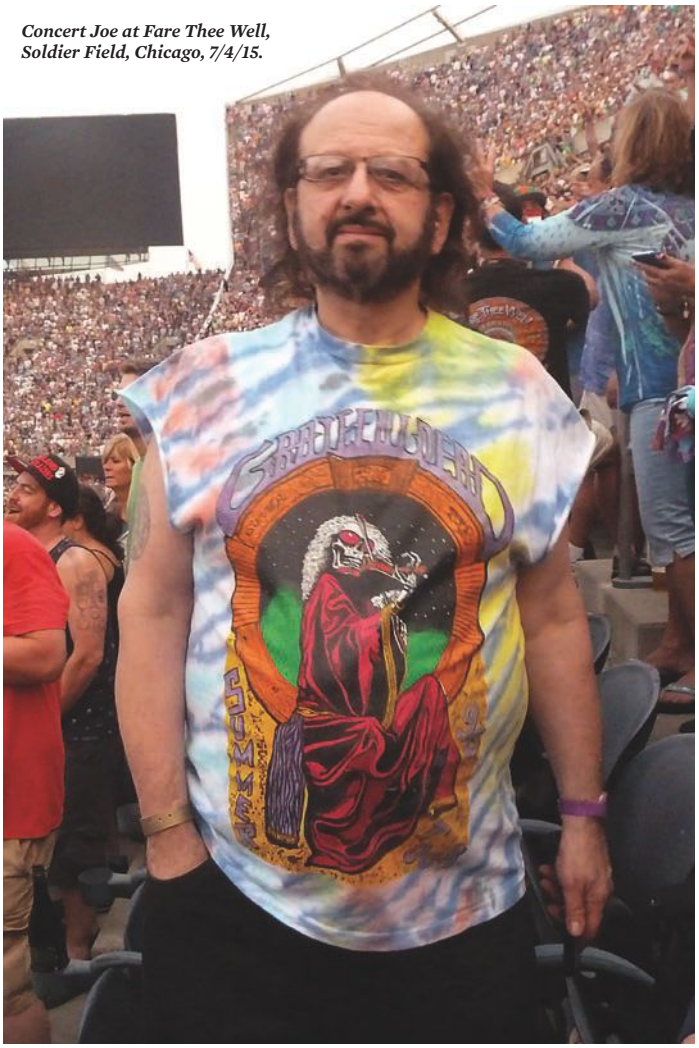
On Saturday night, following an appropriate opener of "Above the Waves," The Disco Biscuits welcomed **The Motet**'s horn section to the stage for David Bowie's "Let's Dance." The next night, under a full moon, Umphrey's **Brendan Bayliss** sat in with the jamtronica pioneers for a version of Prince's "Controversy," before the Biscuits transitioned back into their own "Sweating Bullets." Earlier on Sunday, Bayliss entertained fans with a poolside solo set that featured vocals by a few children in the Umphrey's McGee family, including Bayliss' son Roman on Bob Marley's "Three Little Birds."

Whereas Monday is a gloomy travel day for most festivals, Dominican Holidaze was still in full swing. The Disco Biscuits performed their classic twist on "Pygmy Twylyte" to honor the anniversary of Frank Zappa's death and brought "Rivers" back into their repertoire, a song they hadn't played in a whopping 226 shows. Joe Russo's Almost Dead had arguably the best time slot of the weekend, closing out four days of great weather and even better music starting at 11 p.m. After playing "Feels Like a Stranger" and "Bertha" with "Throwing Stones" teases, the audience was treated to a Benevento/Russo Duo sequence, bookended by "Playing in the Band" and "Tennessee Jed." Guitarists **Scott Metzger** and **Tom Hamilton** stepped into the spotlight as well, leading a scorching guitar jam that prefaced their encore of "Jack Straw."

NO SLEEP 'TIL WETLANDS

The man who has attended more concerts than anyone else in a single year, looks back to 1992 when he saw 1,031 shows, "opening acts not included."

By **CONCERT JOE SARKIS**



Concert Joe at Fare Thee Well, Soldier Field, Chicago, 7/4/15.

I STARTED going to concerts in 1971. In 1972, I bought a ticket for every show at Central Park that summer. That was what really started it for me. I then met and learned from the greatest two concert-goers of all time, Ticket-Stub Stuey and Everynight Charley.

In 1989, I began petitioning *The Guinness Book of World Records* in London to create a category for "Most Concerts Attended in a Single Year." I had seen over 500 concerts that year. They said that no one was interested, yet they had categories for "Loudest Pig Call" and for those who could throw a cow turd the farthest. My friends and I were seeing more shows and knew the NYC concert scene better than anyone. [Legendary New York concert promoter] Ron Delsener would sometimes call me into his office and ask about up-and-coming bands and what I thought of his multiple lineups.

In 1991, the Grateful Dead played Madison Square Garden for nine nights. After the first show, I went to Wo Hop in Chinatown to eat. Mickey Hart and his friend were sitting at the table next to ours, and we spoke to him.

Then, for the next eight nights, I accomplished a feat never achieved before or since by any Deadhead. After seeing the Dead, I attended three full concerts in a single night. I did this for eight nights in a row, including four other shows per night on the Dead's two off nights in between the shows.

Ticket-Stub Stuey, who taught me everything, came up with an idea one night in line outside the Beacon Theatre. It was the middle of December 1991, and he said, "There's still two weeks left in the year and you've already seen 750 concerts. Are you going to try for 1,000 next year?"

I was never attempting to achieve anything except for trying to see as many shows as possible. So I said, "I'll never make that many shows." Then, Stuey said, "Sure you can, I'll help you," and the rest is history.

So, in 1992, I went to three shows a night on weekdays and five or six per night on weekends. I skipped some shows that I would have otherwise attended so my 1,000th show that year would be Jorma Kaukonen at Wetlands. The *New York Post* was the first to publicize the 1,000 show attempt about a week before New Year's Eve.

Larry Bloch, the late founder of the Wetlands Preserve, set a red ribbon outside Wetlands for me to walk through and also let me introduce the band that night. MTV used my ribbon-cutting photo for a story on MTV news for two days in the beginning of 1993.

I really owe a lot to a DJ on WPLJ-FM radio. He listed [the story] on a special newsfeed only for radio stations, and it made it to over 300 stations nationwide. Even my friends in Germany saw the MTV clip there. Then, the *STAR* printed a full-page story.

I had asked the *Guinness Book* to allow me to leave a book at each venue, where I would sign in with a witness for each show in 1993, but they still said there was no interest. So I kept a journal of all the shows and saw 1,031 full shows that year—opening acts not included. I'm sure that I saw at least 200 more, but anything that I saw for a half hour or less was not counted, along with the 100 or so that I could not remember or find out the name of the band. In the five year period from 1991 through 1995, I saw 4,000-plus shows. No one has ever attempted nor accomplished that.

I never got in *Guinness*, but Ron Delsener cleared it up for me. He said, "How many people do you know with a copy of *The Guinness of World Records* in their home? You got on MTV, VH1, were in *The New York Times* and were also on a bunch of radio stations. You're better off!"

To date, I've seen 17,000-plus full shows (opening acts not included).

Concert Joe has been a regular presence on the New York music circuit for over 40 years. He continues to track the live-music scene on his "concert hotline" at concertjoe.com, and connect with both fans and industry professionals through his newsletter.

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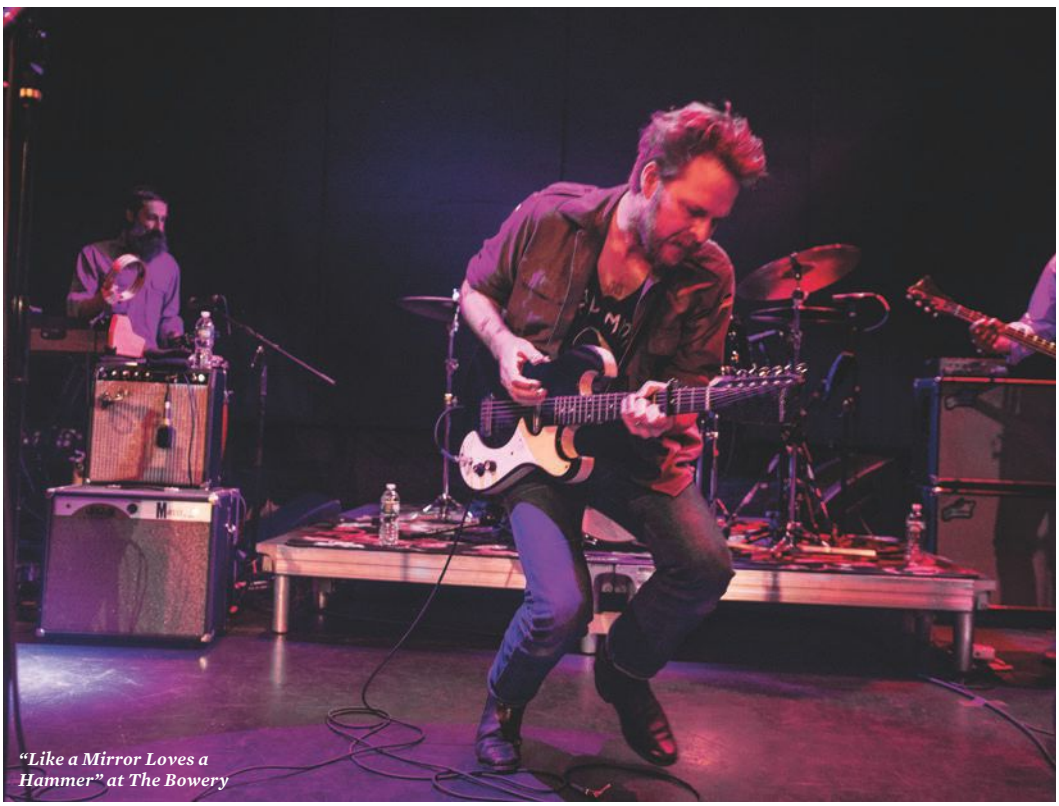
Soundcheck

LIVE REVIEWS AND NEWS FROM AROUND THE GLOBE *Compiled by* DEAN BUDNICK

HISS GOLDEN MESSENGER

BOWERY BALLROOM
NEW YORK
DECEMBER 7–8



"Like a Mirror Loves a Hammer" at The Bowery

Across two nights at New York's Bowery Ballroom, **Hiss Golden Messenger** led a master class in soulful simplicity. The North Carolina troupe, orchestrated by singer and songwriter **M.C. Taylor**, taps deep into the human spirit and brings the audience along as they perform some of the most stirring, insightful and uplifting folk music of the last decade. A Hiss concert isn't an immediate thrill—that's not their mission—and the show's not really about them.

"We're going to try something," Taylor said at one point on the second night. "It'll work if you sing along; it will fall flat if you don't, so..." he trailed off as a guitar spun the opening line of The Beatles' "Don't Let Me Down" and the room erupted in a chorus of voices. Hiss is a group that thrives on audience interaction, knowing full well the transformative power that it can have on a show. Songs like "Red Rose Nantahala" and "Heart Like a Levee" almost sound incomplete until you hear them with the crowd's voices joining in, calling back to the very foundations of folk music. Taylor and company approach their performances with such a level of authenticity and intimacy that it didn't take long for the crowd to warm up and be part of the experience.

That being said, Hiss has the ability to coalesce into a *band*, and some of the Bowery stand's highlights came in the moments when they would turn up the volume and allow themselves to get looser and jammier, especially the first night's one-two punch of "Like a Mirror Loves a Hammer" and "I'm a Raven (Shake Children)," which rose from swaggering, swampy funk into a heavy-hitting crescendo guided by lead guitarist **Ryan Gustafson** and Bon Iver saxophonist **Michael Lewis**. Even on the gentler songs, the talent in all of the members of the musical family that Taylor has gathered around him can be staggering, not least of which stems from Hiss' not-so-secret weapon, Megafaun alum **Phil Cook**. His harmonica solos on "Gulfport You've Been on My Mind" brought down the house each night, and his beautiful piano work on "Caledonia, My Love" perfectly accompanied Taylor's voice and softly strummed acoustic guitar.

While the music wins over new fans and the band grows stronger with each tour, when it comes to Hiss Golden Messenger, what sticks with you when you walk out of the venue each night is the overall feeling of the show. It's the jokes and stories Taylor tells, about almost giving up on music, about his children, about the band's stoned late-night trip to a bodega, and it's about the messages in the songs they play. "There are a lot of people out there suffering from a lack of love in their life, and they do bad things because of it. When you leave here tonight, do something good for someone," Taylor said near the end of each show, as an intro to the group's cover of the Pops Staples song "Friendship." A fitting capstone to the shows, both nights he insisted that the crowd sing along, and sing they did. ***Carter Shelter***

ALONE AND TOGETHER

SIXTH & I
WASHINGTON, D.C.
DECEMBER 14

The latest "Alone and Together" grouping kicked off their three-show mini-run up the Eastern seaboard on the third night of Hannukah, fittingly, at Washington, D.C.'s Sixth & I—a historic dowtnown synagogue complete with Judaic decor, wooden pews and a friendly staff of volunteers.

This version of the

Zack Filkoff

Alone and Together celebrate Hannukah in the nation's capital

makeshift quintet, which has had several different configutations during the past few years, found **Elvis Perkins**, **Sam Cohen** and **Eric D. Johnson** sharing lead vocals, guitar and keyboard duties, backed by **Josh Kaufman** on bass and **Joe Russo** on drums. Warming up the blustery Thursday evening, the ensemble delivered two hours of mostly original songs penned by the fronting trio and peppered with covers by all-time great songwriters (Bobby Charles, Leonard Cohen, Willie Nelson). Their eclectic array reflected the breadth of the three artists' deep discographies—offering telling tales of genuine love, relationship woes, political turmoil and traditional (yet cosmically-tinged) country narratives.

The unique approach and loose concept quickly endeared the musicians to the pew-seated crowd below. Under the ornately painted dome of the temple, the event had the communion and intimacy of a Nashville songwriters' night. Perkins showcased the room's pristine acoustics by blanketing patrons in expansive tremolo tones during the set's opener, a cover of Bobby Charles' 1972 "I Must Be in Good Place Now."

Tasteful and well-executed improvisation transformed songs like Perkins' "All Today;" they were driven by the intersection of Cohen's guitar chops and the deft rhythm section of Russo and Kaufman. Each soloist showed off their strengths when they stepped into the spotlight: Cohen's riveting creativity on a six- or 12-string, Johnson's angelic and emotive vocal prowess, and Perkins' commanding timing and attention-grabbing lyrical delivery.

Fitting for a celebration of people coming together, the artists gave tribute to friends and family members in attendance. Cohen paid homage to his father with a stellar cover of Willie Nelson's "One Day at a Time" and supplied a late-set highlight with the live debut of a country tune called "Dead Rider."

After a brief retreat to a small room offstage, the group returned to deliver an emotionally charged version of Leonard Cohen's "There Is a War." Perkins leaned into the rhythm of the evening, calling out to protest, "Why don't you come on back to the war, that's right, get in it/ Why don't you come on back to the war, it's just beginning."

Wesley Hodges and Sean O'Brien

DAVID RAWLINGS

THE NATIONAL
RICHMOND, VA.
DECEMBER 8

On a wintery evening at The National in Richmond, **David Rawlings**' radiant grin, engaging eyes and kaleidoscopic movements acted as the glue that held things together. It was a journey welded with precision like his latest album, *Poor David's Almanack,* yet it felt impulsive and spontaneous.

The night began with the funny fluff of "Money Is the Meat in the Coconut." After this intoxicatingly light start, the group moved through lovely, powerful tunes like *Almanack*'s "Cumberland Gap" as well as "Yup," a delightful play-on-words piece that is surprisingly substantial in its text. It's a tribute to God's creation of woman, whose "greatest gift over men" is the ability "to go down to the devil and come back again." A number of songs featured **Gillian Welch**'s lovely harmony vocals, which emphasized the songbook's evocative, yearning lyrics.

While Rawlings has long existed in Welch's talented shadow, both of these Americana veterans are icons by now—even if they still collaborate on most projects—and they remain smooth onstage, knowing each other's moves well. The same could be said of their bandmates, as fiddle player **Brittany Haas** and bassist **Paul Kowert** remained sympatico. The string players watched each other throughout, reacting to each other's movement with intensity of their own. **Willie Watson** had a quiet look of concentration through much of the show, with an intense, thoughtful expression, except when Rawlings called him out to solo. At that point, Watson's voice shifted into high gear, with a correspondingly high pitch at times, and his animated busker personality took off.

Still, the centerpiece for the night was Rawlings. His guitar playing included intricate, yet full-bodied plucking that danced up and down his fretboard, leading him to rise high on almost-tiptoes in his golden-brown cowboy boots at times. He was the long, lean cowboy figure in an embroidered cowboy shirt and white Resistol or Stetson, as at home on the banjo as he was on the guitar.

The evening concluded with several encores as the group made two trips back to the stage, including a fine salute to the Western gambler, "The Last Pharaoh." Rawlings later emerged after the show to greet fans by the stage, hopping down at one point to audience level. He may be a showman, but he also gives off the vibe of a truly good guy.

Ron Wray

David Rawlings and company warm up a wintery night

Sean O'Brien (You and I), Ron Wray (Rawlings)

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DAVID BROMBERG QUINTET

THE FOUNDRY
ATHENS, GA.
DECEMBER 14

Just a year removed from his brilliant *The Blues, Whole Blues and Nothing but the Blues* release, **David Bromberg** opened his recent Athens stop with that album's lead track "Walkin' Blues." However, that was the only time the veteran singer-songwriter and his quintet touched his latest offering. They did play several from the previous release, *Only Slightly Mad*, like "I'll Take You Back"—its defiant humor and updated lyrics (he even took a shot at our President's love of Twitter) enlivened the crowd as much as the band's engaging interplay did. Bromberg's spoken-word portions during that tune and the set-closing "Will Not Be Your Fool" each elicited much audible laughter from the crowd. The latter found guitarist **Mark Cosgrove** and violinist **Nate Grower** trading licks behind Bromberg's at-times frantic descriptions of what the narrator would rather do than be a fool once again.

Still a superb vocalist, Bromberg's crooning during Paul Siebel's "Any Day Woman" and his Chicago buddy Thom Bishop's "Just Because You Didn't Answer," were each buoyed by masterful fiddle from Grower, while David paid tribute to The Stanley Brothers with "Fields Have Turned Brown," which allowed Cosgrove to demonstrate his mandolin abilities.

The band also kicked up some dirt—a low-down take on "Nobody's Fault but Mine" featured Bromberg's slide guitar work and Cosgrove's electric chops, and a fiery run through the 80-year-old ode to reefer, "If You're a Viper," made the hazy-eyed happy. They also brought forth a whisper-to-a-roar rendition of Ian Tyson's "Summer Wages," which has been a frequent fixture in Bromberg's set for decades.

However, the quiet moments were the strongest ones. Bromberg used his entire fretboard throughout Bill Browning's "Dark Hollow," coercing extended solos out of Cosgrove and Grower, while the gentle-but-still-deep groove seduced some of the seated audience to dance. The band hushed the room with an almost completely unamplified version of Carole King's "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow" and a cappella readings of the gospel "Standing in the Need of Prayer" and "Strongest Man Alive" (introduced by Bromberg as an, "old English drinking song I wrote"). Each benefitted from a silently mesmerized audience. The Appalachian-tinged instrumental "Maydells Reel" preluded Cosgrove's solo flatpicking of "Alabama Jubilee" (sent out to those who helped elect Doug Jones this week) and Bromberg's own stellar solo fingerpicked reading of Leroy Carrs' "Midnight Hour Blues." At the end of the night, Bromberg shined a light on Jerry Jeff Walker, a man with whom he collaborated and toured in the '70s, eschewing a spoken-word section and instead focusing on delivering an absolutely gripping version of "Mr. Bojangles." ***Rob Turner***

The spirit moves David Bromberg

John DeStefano

HOPPY HOLIDAYS

THE FILLMORE AUDITORIUM
DENVER, COLO.
DECEMBER 2

Kyle Hollingsworth has hosted his annual Hoppy Holidays since 2014 and, in addition to his solo band, this year's Christmas brouhaha boasted sets by area heroes **Yonder Mountain String Band** and local rockers **Dragondeer**. The idea behind Hoppy Holidays is to bring together some incredible groups and throw a beer fest at The Fillmore. It's a seven-hour event with doors opening at 5:30 p.m. and the beer flowing immediately. Patrons took part in a two-hour tasting from some of the best craft breweries from Colorado and beyond.

Well-known brewers such as Odell, Great Divide, Breckenridge and Ska offered a slew of beers, however, it was

Dragondeer performs while the beer flows

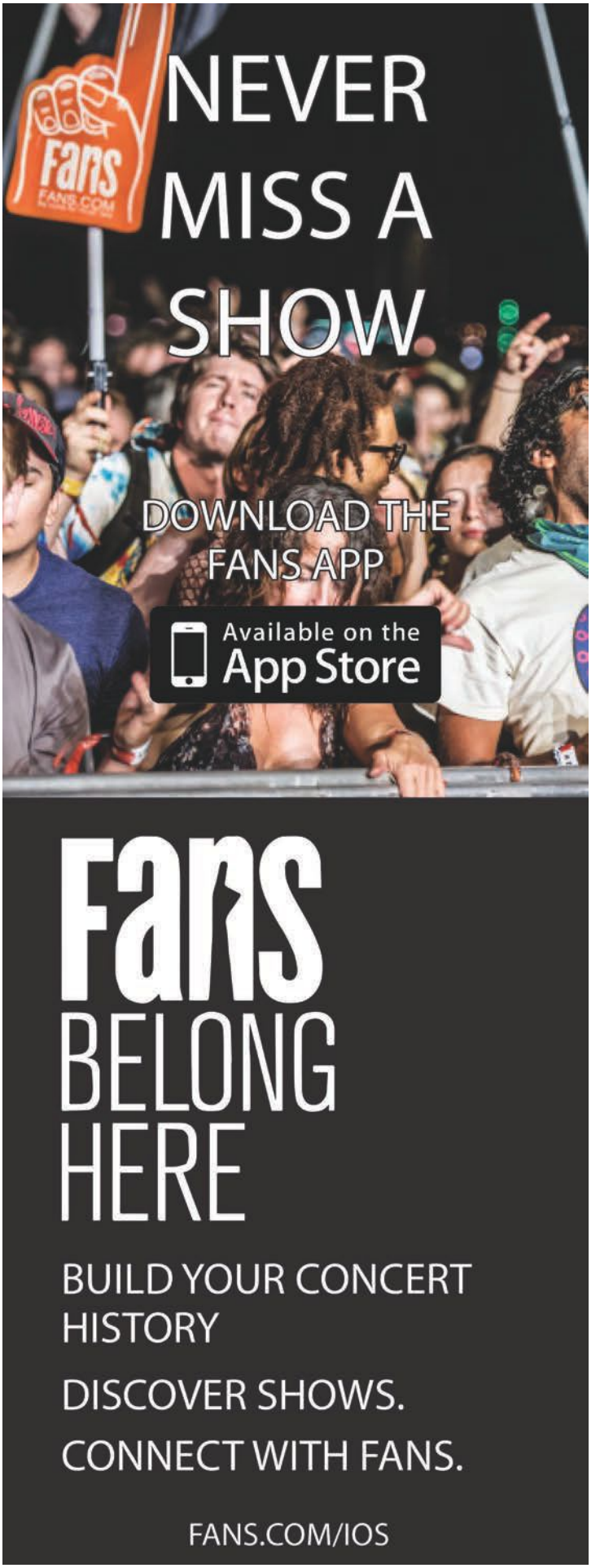
Mitch Kilne

Destihl Brewery that won top honors, as voted on by the fans and aficionados sipping suds. Runner up went to Mockery, with Odd 13 rounding out the top three. Not long after the beer began pouring, Dragondeer took the stage. This group of explosive psych-blues up-and-comers bring soul to their angst.

Soon after, the vendors disassembled the beer fest and the floor was cleared for the evening's host and band. Hollingsworth's group consists of guitarist **Dan Schwindt**, bassist **Paul McDaniel** and drummer **Brian McRae** and, on this night, the remarkable singer **Paige Sandusky** also joined the outfit. The darkened stage gave off an eerie vibe as they opened with Pink Floyd's "One of These Days." The keyboardist and his band then performed several original tracks that Hollingsworth has made popular with The String Cheese Incident, including a heavy "Let's Go Outside." Yonder Mountain String Band's **Jake Jolliff** and **Adam Aijala** emerged for a standout version of the instrumental "Boo Boo's Pik-A-Nik" and a rousing rendition of the Jerry Garcia and Robert Hunter classic "Deal," before Yonder's **Allie Kral** made her way on stage for the fiddle solo on The Who's "Baba O'Riley." While this song was initially plagued with sound issues, it ended on a high note before the entire band burst into "Rosie." They segued into an unexpected version of Cake's "Short Skirt Long Jacket" before returning to "Rosie" to close out an epic show.

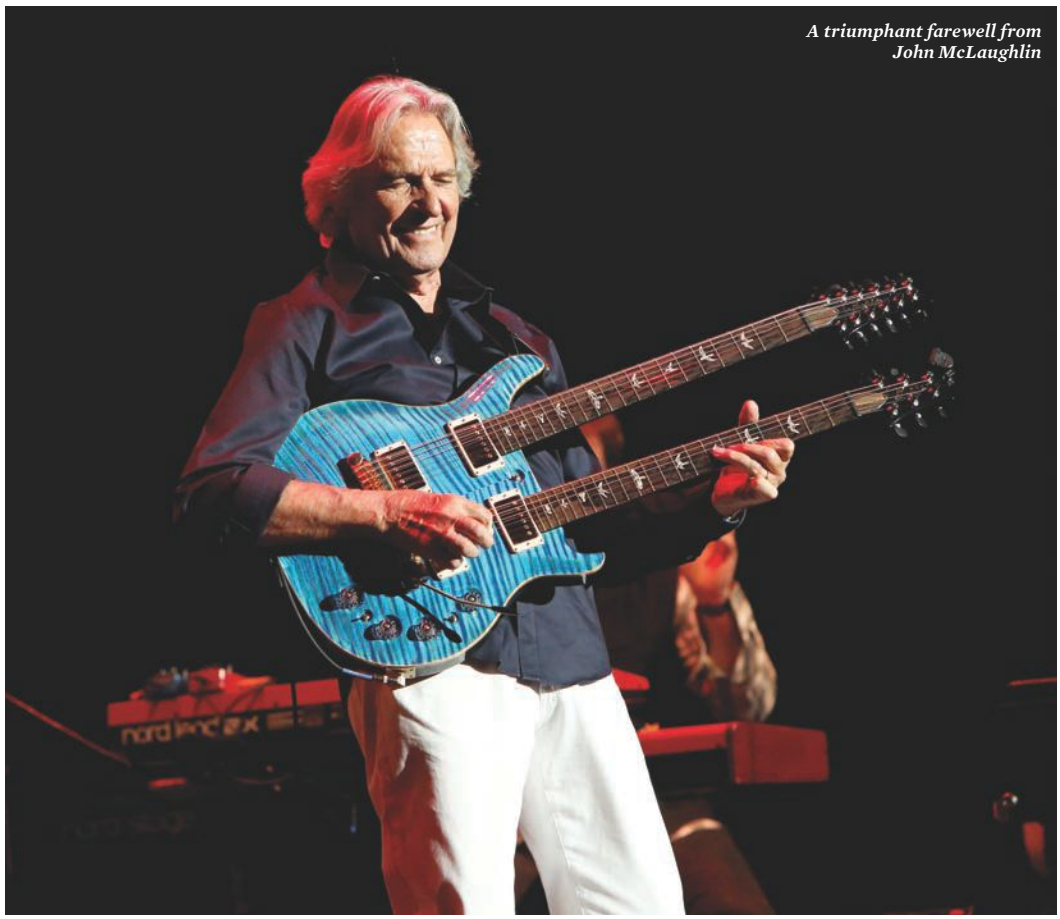
Yonder took the headlining slot with a chunky closing set full of fan favorites and ridiculous covers. They kicked things off with **Ben Kaufmann** singing "Casualty" and then "Bad Taste," before **Dave Johnston** took the reins on "Just the Same." A strong "Black Sheep," featuring Hollingsworth and several memorable solos from the whole band, was followed by a sweet "Criminal" with Hollingsworth remaining on keys. Then Jolliff sang a version of America's "Sister Golden Hair." This was the first of several covers, and, suddenly, **G-Real** appeared for Cypress Hill's "Hits From the Bong." Shortly after, Kral delivered a beguiling version of Dusty Springfield's "Son of a Preacher Man," before the group offered a bluegrass take on the Edgar Winter instrumental "Frankenstein." The quintet ended a stellar set with "Landfall" into "Sidewalk Stars," returning for a quick encore that included "Take a Chance on Me," which led into Neutral Milk Hotel's "Holland 1945."

Nicholas Stock



JOHN MCLAUGHLIN AND THE 4TH DIMENSION/ JIMMY HERRING AND THE INVISIBLE WHIP

CENTER FOR THE ART OF PERFORMANCE AT UCLA – ROYCE HALL LOS ANGELES DECEMBER 9



A triumphant farewell from John McLaughlin

On the last show of his farewell United States tour, **John McLaughlin** received the curtain call he deserved. Presented by Center for the Art of Performance at UCLA, the host and venue for the send-off were selected by the guitarist himself, reprising his initial visit to the university 43 years ago: an October 1974 appearance with Mahavishnu Orchestra. Though this evening of music was threatened for a time earlier in the week by encroaching wildfires—Royce Hall sitting about a mile from what was the evacuation zone—the standout closing concert went on as scheduled.

Jimmy Herring and the Invisible Whip opened for McLaughlin and his **4th Dimension** throughout the goodbye run. It was a pairing without parallel, with McLaughlin calling Herring one of his two favorite players, (Jeff Beck, the other). Needing no introduction, Herring and his four mates eased into the light to enthusiastic applause from the sold-out house. A guitarist known for his stints with The Allman Brothers Band, Phil Lesh and, currently, Widespread Panic, Herring's true loves are the exacting progressive fusion and improvisational instrumental workouts he became enamored with listening to Mahavishnu as a teen.

Herring's style is, of course, his own. He's a sublime colorist in a band of equally brilliant painters. A tonality and fluency on his instrument that burn purple and blue into dark red, he opened aptly with the tribute "John McLaughlin," before dipping back to his Allman days with a note-perfect "Les Brers in A Minor," as multi-instrumentalist **Jason Crosby** offered beautifully doubled harmony lines on violin.

Herring shared the space sensibly, almost deferentially, giving keyboardist **Matt Slocum** plenty of time for jarring Clavinet and enveloping B-3 organ, pushed to the edges by **Kevin Scott**'s versatile bass and **Jeff Sipe**'s meticulous drumming. At one point near the conclusion of the seven-song set, during Miles Davis' "Black Satin," a lone piece of confetti floated gently down from the eaves, leftover from some other long ago Royce event, rousted loose by the shuddering and celebratory sounds onstage and wanting to join the party.

A short intermission followed, with McLaughlin and his three compatriots arriving to a standing ovation. The guitarist, gliding in comfortable Nikes, stayed conspicuously off-center, tucked in between bassist **Etienne M'Bappé** and keyboardist **Gary Husband**. He only moved to the center mic to give a few humble introductions between songs and hellos to old hippies.

Age is qualifier in music, sometimes overestimating the need for youthful energy, especially in pulling off the dexterous and lightning-quick arrangements that McLaughlin wrote for Mahavishnu decades ago. If anything, the master has become more masterful, hitting every change with taste and clarity, clipping notes for bite and then bending for a mournful moan. He was joyful, smiling as he admired the rapid scat vocal of drummer **Ranjit Barot** or Husband's multilayered solos, expounding patiently on "New Blues, Old Bruise" or paying touching homage to the late Paco de Lucía with "El Hombre Que Sabia."

Six songs in, McLaughlin called back Herring and the Invisible Whip, uniting both ensembles for a set of Mahavishnu classics. Opening with "Meeting of the Spirits," the two bands were riveting in tandem, jetting through odd-time rhythms with aplomb, all with big ears creating pockets of groove and exploration. Like the proverbial moths to the flame, notes came in swarms, clustering in sharp bursts and dancing off into darkness. McLaughlin and Herring bookended each other, displaying a kinship that rose above any competitive notion, trading solos as did the pairings of bassists, keyboardists and drummers, with Slocum and Husband often clapping out the meter.

The night's last two offerings were contrasting entries—"You Know, You Know" and "Be Happy." One was moody and probing, the other was bright and inspired. As the musicians took their final bows, chiseled into the Royce Hall stone above them reads an inscription that could have easily been written with players like these in mind: "Education Is Learning to Use the Tools Which the Race Has Found Indispensable."

Larson Sutton

Rachel Murray/Getty Images for CAP UCLA

WES SAMUEL

By BRADLEY TUCKER

WES SAMUEL MAY BE responsible for some of the fastest-rising acts on the jamband and festival circuits, but the 36-year-old agent still often looks back on his days as a Florida teen, which helped carve his path forward. Throughout his wide-spanning career, Samuel has explored all sides of the concert industry, working as a high-school ticket taker and college promoter, before helping to put together large-scale events like Jam Cruise and Langerado. In 2010, the boutique agency he worked for merged with Madison House, and Samuel now helps shepherd marquee acts like TAUK, Twiddle, Midnight North and Papadosio. "The more well-rounded you are, the better you are going to be at your job," Samuel says. "Do anything you can to create relationships and understand how things work."

What was your first job related to music?

When I was in high school, my parents told me to get a job to pay for gas and my car, and a buddy of mine had read an article that the Coral Sky Amphitheatre was hiring. I got a job as a ticket taker—this was '96 or '97, before the days of scanning tickets, so people would come in and you would rip their ticket and drop it in a bag.

After about a year or two, they allowed me to become a concierge. Part of the time, I was still taking tickets, but then, instead of having to go back in the room and go through inquisitions for a manager counting all these tickets, they would stick me backstage where I was anything from a runner to a hospitality person to a production assistant. That was the tipping point for me—my first real taste of seeing how promoters and artists interact.

At the University of Florida in Gainesville, you were in a unique situation where your student-run club was the biggest talent buyer in that region.

One of my friends from back home, who was a year or two older than me, got me involved in Student Government Productions. We put on concerts through the program counsel using school money. Within a year, I had slowly but surely moved most of my focus away from my studies into SGP.

I held every position that was available, including president. Our budget floated around half a million dollars. The concert program divisions at most colleges and universities were strictly regulated and the concerts would take place at the student union or somewhere on campus. We would do shows at the stadium where the basketball team would play: Oysterhead, Snoop Dogg, Busta Rhymes, Stone Temple Pilots, Jane's Addiction. I was a 20-year-old kid with half a million bucks to spend—with absolutely no intention of getting that money back.

Did that lead you to working with Langerado?

In 2006, Alicia Karlin—who now works at Madison House—introduced me to two guys out in South Florida who were producing Langerado, Mark Brown and Ethan Schwartz. Alicia and I went to college together, and she was heavily involved in the SGP world. Mark had also just started an event called Jam Cruise with his company, Cloud 9 Adventures.

I ended up working there from 2007–2009. There were three of us and we had a little office down in a South Florida strip mall. I split my time between working on Langerado, which drew about 10,000 people a year [except for 2008 when the festival moved to Big Cypress and brought in around 25,000 per day], and Jam Cruise. I did everything from cataloging the ship's manifest to calculating the budgets and answering the phone in case anyone had a question or wanted to switch rooms.

Then, I started to get a little burned-out. As a promoter, you're dependent on so many things that are out of your control, like the weather, and you've got so much pressure coming from the artist's world to be able to produce their vision. I decided that I wanted to switch to the artist side. I had done business with a lot of agents but, at that point, to be an agent, you had to move to New York and get into one of the larger agencies. You'd go through a rigorous application process to be stuck in a mailroom with 50 other people just like you and then fight it out with those guys. It seemed like another rat race.

Around that time, a friend of mine, "Boca" Phil Egenthal, moved to Florida. He'd worked at Evolution Talent Agency in the early 2000s and he'd recently got married and opened his own small boutique agency called Philosophy Agency, working with acts like The New Deal and the Benevento/Russo Duo. I was able to dive right in and assist him and learn what an agent did. I was also able to jump a lot of steps to get right into routing tours and booking tours, talking to promoters and learning how contracts work.

In 2010, Philosophy Agency merged with Madison House.

At that point, I'd only been there for about a year, and it was just the two of us. The merger was an organic thing—it's hard to pinpoint what really got the ball rolling. It was a combination of long-term business and personal relationships. And we came up here [to Colorado] and integrated ourselves into Madison House, bringing all of our clients over.

Did your earlier training inform your work as an agent?

The stuff I learned as a ticket taker 100 percent makes me a better agent—how to deal with fans coming in during the rain or how to deal with an angry tour manager who just wants to get to the next town. To this day, if a client shows up to a festival and says, "I saw catering's closed—we can't eat," I can say, "I know the guy who works catering because I worked for him 10 years ago."

YUSUF / CAT STEVENS

Decades after embracing Islam and giving up the secular music world, the artist formerly known as Cat Stevens reclaims his name. *By* **MIKE GREENHAUS**

WHEN HE WAS A teenager, Muhammad Islam took a risk and smuggled a guitar into his family home in Dubai. At first, Islam, who goes by Yoriyos, kept the instrument hidden from his father, Yusuf Islam—an observant Muslim whose faith complicated his feelings toward secular music—but, around 2002, Yoriyos decided to hand his dad the instrument. And, instead of punishing his son, the simple gesture ignited something in the elder Islam, best known to the Western music world as Cat Stevens—and set Yusuf on a course that led to one of the most unexpected comebacks in pop-music history, as well as his first-ever Grammy nomination for the 2017 LP, *The Laughing Apple*.

"This is the fourth in a new series of recordings beginning in 2006," Yusuf says of *The Laughing Apple*, the first album to use the Cat Stevens name since 1978. (The record is technically credited to Yusuf / Cat Stevens.) "My last album [2014's *Tell 'Em I'm Gone*] was an exploration into my love of the blues and R&B, and the environment I grew up in—London, the clubs and the things that affected me."

The Laughing Apple is a natural follow-up to that roots-inspired set, a full-circle return to some of Yusuf's early landmarks on the 50th anniversary of his breakthrough, *Matthew & Son*. For the sessions, Yusuf reunited with producer Paul Samwell-Smith and guitarist Alun Davies, both veterans of some of his most storied 1970s sessions, and revisited songs from his 1967 sophomore release, *New Masters*: "Blackness of the Night," "Northern Wind (Death of Billy the Kid)," "I'm So Sleepy" and "The Laughing Apple." He also rerecorded and modified "Grandsons," which previously appeared on a 2000 hits compilation as "I've Got a Thing About Seeing My Grandson Grow Old," and finished "You Can Do (Whatever)," a number originally intended for the 1971 black comedy cult classic, *Harold and Maude*. Lyrically, the songs are just as relevant today as they were during the height of The Age Of Aquarius.

"I didn't have to change one word—it's still extremely dark," he says, noting that he was never happy with producer Mike Hurst's heavy-handed approach and always hoped to strip away the lush arrangements that marred the original records. "[Matt] was totally in love with *Pet Sounds* and created a layer that drowned out the songs. But Paul had a knack for capturing the spirit of the song without intervening too much. When you get together with likeminded musicians and artists, you create something for that moment. I was able to play my own guitar and reclaim those songs."

Yusuf paired those refreshed catalog cuts with a number of newer compositions like "Don't Blame Them," "Mighty Peace," "Mary and the Little Lamb," "You Can Do (Whatever)," "See What Love Did to Me" and "Olive Hill." Despite being written decades apart, the tunes fit snuggly together; he lightly embellished the "family of songs" with rootsy flurishes and Indian string influences. The overall goal was to create the homey feeling of folk musicians passing around songs and ideas.

"Everyone needs a seat at the table, and the new songs were perfect for this banquet," he says. "I've had these melodies in my head since 2006—the spark of the ideas of the lyrics gave me the solution. I live in Dubai and hear a lot of that kind of lively music. You are not really in control—waiting for the moment, you get carried along. [The songs touch on people] fighting for their own survival; the world is a not very welcome place."

Cat Stevens famously left the popular music world in 1978 after converting to Islam following a near-death experience. He'd later admit that he'd tired of his life as a celebrity entertainer. For many years, he shied away from recording altogether, and the religious and educational recordings he released in the 1990s and 2000s—like the children's' collection *A Is for Allah*—featured only vocals and some percussion. Encouraged by his children, he started inching back into the spotlight, recording a new version of "Peace Train" in 2003 and releasing the mainstream full lengths *An Other Cup* and *Roadsinger* in 2006 and 2009, respectively. As religious tensions increased following the September 11 attacks, Yusuf started to see his music as a positive way to act as an ambassador for his faith; after studying the Quran with his spiritual guide and speaking with members of his Muslim community, he started to see his music as an important tool in spreading peace. However, there were some bumps along the way—in 2004, Yusuf was denied entry to the US "on the grounds of national security" after airline officials mistakenly spotted his name on a watch list.

"Most of the problems we have start with someone not reading something right, not getting the whole picture," he says. "People rely on hearsay. A song like 'Don't Blame Them,' which I lifted from Beethoven, is very appropriate because it deals with prejudice."

He eventually started performing, too, and was able return to the US for a string of 2014 appearances that included a Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction and a well-publicized December outing that bypassed New York because of the city's policy against paperless ticketing; he loosened up his restriction in time for 2016's "A Cat's Attic Tour," a borderline theatrical performance that featured an onstage recreation of his childhood home and props representing the various eras of his life.

"I got the concept of the attic, and that enabled me to build my world in chronological order," he says. "The audience was able to hear my humor a little during the in-between moments. They got to know me more; it exposed my character."

The tour's unique, biographical format and storyteller feel has inspired Yusuf to look even deeper into his history. The now 69-year-old singer hopes to make a musical based off his life and has been actively working on an official autobiography.

"That process does help you sweep out the cobwebs," he says. "One of the amazing things is that I look at the charts and see what was happing. I want to document these moments and introduce these interesting characters around me." He pauses and adds, "And introduce a different, less serious side of me."

SOJA

Poetry in Motion BY DEAN BUDNICK

"WE MAKE MUSIC FOR the fans," SOJA lead singer and principal songwriter Jacob Hemphill explains. "We're not one of those groups that's trying to do something exclusively for us. We're trying to create music that ends up helping people. And if we can do that, then it feels like we're doing what we're supposed to do."

The eight-piece group once again set out with that in mind when they entered Haunted Hollow Studio in Charlottesville, Va., to record *Poetry in Motion*. "We were sitting on about 20 songs, and playing them over the course of maybe two years," says the SOJA frontman. "We decided to do it with just us. As we progress as a band, we do more with outside musicians and producers and singers, and all of this stuff starts getting added. On this one, just the band went into the studio, and we played music for each other, so we could all add our input the whole time. We made it as if we were kids again."

This final sentiment is certainly fitting, as the band members first came together as high-school students in Arlington, Va. When SOJA started out in 1997, they were a roots-reggae act, although the group now incorporates elements of Latin, rock, hardcore and hip-hop. In addition to Hemphill, their current lineup features Robert "Bobby Lee" Jefferson (bass), Ryan Berty (drums), Kenneth Brownell (percussion), Patrick O'Shea (keyboards), Hellman Escorcia (saxophone, aerophone), Rafael Rodriguez (trumpet) and Trevor Young (guitar, harmony vocals).

As for the theme of this album, Hemphill discloses, "All of our other records were about something specific. *Born in Babylon* was about rich versus poor. *Strength to Survive* was about humans versus the earth. *Amid the Noise and Haste* was about time versus life. And the new one, *Poetry in Motion*, is trying to pull all of the themes into one thing, and say that, whether it's good or bad, there's something beautiful about everything. It's kind of a simple message on this one."

MOVING STONES

"Moving Stones" is about having something in your life that you know is bad. And it's also about how simple it is to get rid of that thing. But the human condition makes us sort of postpone getting rid of that thing—the same thing that makes us want to accumulate and last forever weirdly makes us postpone it in our day-to-day life.

I CAN'T STOP DREAMING

This is a continuation of a song from the last record called "Lucid Dreams." The thing about lucid dreams is that they keep coming back over and over. They come and go, but they're always sort of there. So I kind of thought to myself that, as my own dreams had changed, maybe I should keep writing this song and changing it.

A lucid dream works like this: You know you're dreaming, unlike normal dreams. And you can sort of control yourself, but there's stuff that comes in from all different sides that reminds you that you're definitely dreaming and that this isn't real. And when you wake up, you sort of want to do something about it, as if you were learning something in there. So for me, the song is worth writing over and over again. I'll probably write more of these.

TRIED MY BEST

"Tried My Best" is about being in the band. The first verse is talking about this feeling. It's weird—ever since I was a little kid, I've had these two feelings. One of them is this house on a hill with a tree, a chimney, a window that's glowing and a door that's inviting you into this place. There are only like six colors—it's really simple and it feels good, like peace. And then I have this other dream, which is every color, noise and action you could think of all in one thing. It feels like fear. And those mental images have always been behind what I'm writing in one way or another.

The song starts, "I feel it when my dreams tear right into my soul." I'm sort of quoting "I Can't Stop Dreaming" and saying it's a feeling that won't go away. From there, I start to talk about my memories of when I was a kid, and then I go on and talk about this recurring dream that I've always had. I think most humans probably have some experience—maybe not this specific one—but something like it, that sort of lets you know you're human.

And then I say in the chorus: "The only thing that ever made sense is when I can feel it." So I'm talking about the feeling. But it's a feeling I can't describe, so in the next line I say, "The only thing that ever made sense is just to carry and conceal it all." That's the right to carry a handgun, a carry-and-conceal license. So I've turned the feeling into a weapon. And then I say, "I'm still doing it now"—the dream hasn't gone anywhere.

Then the next verse describes the band, and how we're "floating down the concrete" in our tour bus: "Flying in the sky, I think we found the bloodstream of our life." The veins in your arm are like the veins on a leaf. And if you zoom out on the earth that we tour, the roads look like veins. That's the bloodstream of our life, the band and the road that they're on. And then I say, "Play me in the particle," as if we're all part of this thing—I'm not different than the bloodstream and the trees and all of that. And then I say, "Put me in the mix." That's a phrase in reggae about switching the dancehall rhythm real quick. But when I say it, I mean more like, "Put me in the mix of the particles in the bloodstream." Then, I look back to those early days when I was a kid and first experienced the light.

MORE

"More" is about accumulation. We've come up with this solution. When your warm, dry,

Continued on page 76

Hiroki Nishioka

LANGHORNE SLIM

By JUSTIN JACOBS

ON A WEDNESDAY night in Nashville, Langhorne Slim is rushing out the door to see the symphony for the very first time—and he plans to look his best.

"I'd been looking for a good suit, one that fits and feels right," he says. "I found it in my buddy's vintage shop down in New Orleans—brown, beautiful pinstripes. I've been wearing it almost daily since I bought it."

It's surprising, but also quite endearing, to hear the 37-year-old singer, born Sean Scolnick, talk about appearances with such enthusiasm. In his music he speaks unapologetically about stripping off our society-forged masks, about destroying our egos, about digging into our true selves. And on his latest album, the excellent *Lost at Last, Vol. 1*, he presents himself as rawer than ever before.

"What guided me [on this album] was the concept of getting out of my own head, to allow myself to be a vessel for melody and words. I wasn't analytical. I allowed myself to dance with the spirits, to channel them," he says. "And when it's happening, it's other-dimensional—dreamlike. That's where the purity lies."

So what does that purity sound like when laid down in the studio? *Lost at Last, Vol. 1* plays as a warmer, gentler, scrappier companion to Slim's critically adored breakthrough, *The Spirit Moves*, from 2015. The album was born on the hood of a rental car parked outside the Newport Folk Festival in 2016—Slim had just watched Patti Smith's set, and he was floored.

"It was the most guttural, real, punk-rock thing I'd seen. I was transported to another place. And I sat on the hood of my rental and started to cry," he remembers. His friend Dan Kasin stepped into his bubble

Harvey Robinson

of public vulnerability, and they began talking music. Kasin also mentioned the new, remote Panoramic House studio in Stinson Beach, Calif., which boasts picturesque views of the Pacific Ocean and loads of analog equipment; it seemed like the perfect fit for the vision Slim had already started to shape.

He started honing in a on new batch of songs that explored old folk tropes—the search for truth, meditations on love, a contemplative look at loneliness—and they called for a real, live delivery.

"My favorite lyricists are often saying something that's simple, or has been said before, but in a way you haven't heard—and it wakes your ass up. So since I'd put out *The Spirit Moves*, I knew I wanted to create something as raw as possible, folky tunes that I taught the guys and they just played along with me—not road-tested material," he says.

Slim rehearsed his new collection of tunes in San Francisco with members of his band, The Law, for five days before camping out in Stinson Beach, "Living together, cooking with each other and creating this thing with each other," he says. "They're songs that I write, but I wanted to live and breathe them with these people, not clock in and out to make a record."

The songs came fast and focused over 10 days on the coast, laid down with a warmth and looseness that paint pictures of late-night sessions, red-orange sunsets and raucous family dinners. Some tunes are soberingly frank; the hushed, fast-picked "Life Is Confusing" finds Slim meditating on ever-elusive stillness: "Can we be happy for a while?/ Can we just sit here, shut up and smile?/ Been talking for hours, forgot what we're saying/ Life is confusing and people are insane."

Later, on the bluesy dirge "Alligator Girl," he's howling over far-off, barroom piano and dusty, stand-up bass runs: "I jumped in the river/ Swam to the bar/ Hoping to be delivered/ Away from the clap of thunder/ Throw the covers from my face/ Lift my head off my pillow/ Check the darkness just in case she wakes."

Recording live to tape inspired a sense of urgency in the band, even as the songs came out as impromptu boot-stomp singalongs. "With tape, the band's got to be ready for the cut," says Slim. "It elevates everybody's mood to be in it all together. It unifies you in a way that captures this raw feeling. That Ray Charles shit, that Louie Armstrong shit—all recorded in one room, and it sounds incredible."

Slim flew to New Orleans, Los Angeles and New York to add horns and, admittedly, overdub a few parts, but the finished *Lost at Last, Vol. 1*, still comes off as a live-in-the-living-room type of old-time folk record—playful and spacious, gently grooving and bouncing, as alive and truthful as Slim had imagined it. And while the album doesn't include any overt calls to go out and find your own truth, it's vulnerable, bare music that Slim hopes will inspire the same introspection in fans—haters be damned.

"In our culture, looking within, feeling vulnerable or sensitive, seeking a more profound or open, spiritual lifestyle—why is that somehow seen as liberal, hippie bullshit?" he asks. "These concepts didn't start in 1968. This is ancient. I know connecting with ourselves and our universe is not for everyone. I just know the more I reveal, the freer I feel. When I open myself up, I want to let it rip."

He pauses, and an energy pulses through the phone.

"Look, we all feel like fucking freaks out here. We all deal with great joys and strengths and major fears," he says. "But at this point, I feel like there's nothing to hide. The wizard behind the curtain? Fuck that curtain already."

HAYLEY JANE AND THE PRIMATES

By **RAFFAELA KENNY-CINCOTTA**

WHEN HAYLEY Jane and the Primates needed to borrow a snare drum for some upcoming shows in Colorado, they knew they could count on Dopapod drummer and fellow Berklee College of Music alum Neal Evans. "He just left it on his porch!" Hayley Jane laughs from the band's greenroom in Denver. Along with Dopapod and Turkuaz, Hayley Jane and the Primates are part of the latest class of "Berklee bands" to emerge out of Boston's artist-friendly neighborhood of Allston. A perfect storm of cheap rent and creative freedom led the bandmates to one another; as it turns out, they learned way more from the school's network of friends and fellow musicians than they ever learned in a classroom. "I'll be paying off my Berklee debt for the rest of my life, but I'm so glad I went there," guitarist Justin Hancock says.

Following their most polished release to date, the crowd-funded sophomore LP *We're Here Now*, the group looks back on their Berklee years fondly, and credits the school for imbuing the band with its core tenets of friendship and fun. The Primates' joy is palpable—Hayley Jane captivates her audiences with the kind of theatrics usually reserved for Mick Jagger or Janis Joplin, and all five band members wear permanent smiles as they jam along genre lines, spinning together influences from the '60s to the '90s.

However, that doesn't mean their story is devoid of tragedy.

In 2011, the unexpected passing of first bassist Devin "Dabbo" Caucci shook the band to their core. Hancock and Hayley Jane, who met through Dabbo, were particularly rattled, but their mutual loss brought them closer together, sparking a deep friendship and songwriting partnership. "After Dabbo passed away is when Hayley and I wrote our first song together," Hancock recalls. "Things really changed when we starting writing together," Hayley Jane adds. "Things started to mature. He knew more about where to take a song and how to make it travel. I could tell a story with words, but I was missing the ability to tell it with music. And Justin definitely filled that in."

With heavy hearts, the band pushed forward and recorded their first EP, *Color Me*, in 2012. And while several short-tenured bassists came in and out of their lives, it wasn't until they met yet another member of their Berklee community, Josh Carter, that "Primates 2.0" began. "We found Josh, and he was the perfect fit," Hayley Jane says. "It was a really big time of transition after [Dabbo]. When we got together with Josh, things started to gel and feel good again. That was an important time of growth for the band."

Recently, Carter's connection with the Primates even spilled over into his personal life. In October, before the band's first headlining show at Brooklyn Bowl in New York, the bassist married former *Relix* staffer Kristen DeTroia onstage beneath a Grateful Dead-themed chuppah. A veteran of the Boston music scene in her own right, DeTroia was more than happy to spend her wedding day alongside the Primates. "My wife loves to talk about how she saw Hayley Jane and the Primates before I was in the band," Carter laughs.

Since the wedding, the band hit the road hard, performing across the country in support of *We're Here Now*. Whereas their debut record *Gasoline* had its fair share of growing pains, this LP feels cohesive and confident—a watershed moment for Hayley Jane and the Primates. Most of the album was recorded in a five-day sprint, and the band was glad to have Turkuaz's Craig Brodhead behind the boards to ease any anxieties. "I feel like a veteran onstage and a complete novice in the studio," Hayley Jane admits, adding how Brodhead provided overdubs. Hancock explains that for a live band so used to feeding off of an audience, "sometimes it's hard to manifest that energy in the studio." However, the singer says, songs like the twangy "Mama" allowed the band to loosen up. "We were hootin' and hollerin' and having a great time."

The ensemble's main goal is to always be "a band that laughs." Hancock continues, "If you're not friends with the people you play music with, after a while, it just isn't fun." And with friendship comes respect. "I don't feel a lot of pressure from anyone to play or sound a certain way, which I think is what makes this band so great," Carter says. From the shredding guitar on album opener "More Interesting," to the unrelenting rhythm section on funk-dance number "You Gotta Move," to the jam power-ballad "Creatures," *We're Here Now* is Hayley Jane and the Primates' sonic expression of their wide-spanning influences, from Phish to Ween to Erykah Badu.

"We're a genre catastrophe," says Hayley Jane. "It's beautiful."

5 ARTISTS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

Madison Corbin (Amanfu)

KITCHEN DWELLERS

BOZEMAN, MONT.

Musings From Montana

When people talk about the most exciting music cities in America, the **Kitchen Dwellers**' hometown of Bozeman, Mont., isn't usually part of the conversation. Yet, according to mandolinist **Shawn Swain**, the sleepy ski town is a hotbed of musical talent. "In Bozeman alone, there's probably 25-30 people who are some of the best players I've ever seen," he says. After starting out as an informal group of college kids who "hung out, drank beers and played tunes," Kitchen Dwellers have since expanded their experimental bluegrass sound by embracing their love of electronica, metal, jam music and everything in between. According to Swain, the string quartet's second LP, *Ghost in the Bottle* is a watershed moment. "This album, in many ways, is a completely different band," Swain says. "It was a project of passion, and it was about reidentifying ourselves." The LP's star-studded liner notes prove his point—contributors include Little Feat's Bill Payne, Greensky Bluegrass' Anders Beck, Railroad Earth's Tim Carbone and the band's longtime friend Mihali Savoulidis of Twiddle. Leftover Salmon's Andy Thorn also sat behind the boards for *Ghost in the Bottle*. Swain, who grew up listening to Leftover Salmon, first met Thorn when he was still an amateur musician, hanging around after festival sets in the hopes of making a connection. ("Eventually, he had no choice but to remember who I was.") In time, Thorn became a mentor and a friend. "Every minute of the process, it was super valuable to have somebody like Andy," Swain recalls. "His insight really allowed for these songs to breathe and grow and have a life of their own."

kitchendwellers.com ***Raffaela Kenny-Cincotta***

RUBY AMANFU

NASHVILLE, TENN.

Songs of Genuine Expression

Ruby Amanfu's vision for her music has changed significantly over the past few years. The artist, born in Ghana and raised in Nashville, sees each musical effort as its own piece of work. Her last solo album, *Standing Still*, dropped in 2015 and Amanfu is now working on her next one. For the singer, it's becoming more important to use music as a means of genuine expression. "I still like for there to be a singular and direct message in each song I write or sing but, lately, I've been most influenced by music that says what it has to say with a sharper edge to it," she notes. "I'm in a season of speaking the truth—always in love—but I'm not really candy-coating things." In the past, the musician has toured with Norah Jones and performed at the Voodoo Music + Arts Experience and AmericanaFest. She also collaborated with Jack White on the 2012 duet "Love Interruption," served as a member of his all-female backup band The Peacocks and sang backing vocals on Beyoncé's "Don't Hurt Yourself" (which also featured White). This year, though, Amanfu will focus on creating music that expresses something beyond emotions. That sensibility is evident in a track she recently unveiled called "When They Go Low, We Go High," which channels some of the discontent in America right now. "For me, art in general is in direct relation to its environment," Amanfu says. "It's innate in me and in many artists to express what is observed. Because of that fact alone, we have a social responsibility, and to deny it is to be disconnected from the universe, in my humble opinion," she adds. "My most appreciated responses from 'When They Go Low, We Go High' have come from people who are on the same mission as me. Some heard the song before the recent Women's March and told me that they had it playing in their headphones while they walked. I was told that it got played over the loud speakers in Utah at a rally. I'm honored by it, to say the least. It's got a lot farther to go in reach, but this is just the beginning." rubyamanfu.com ***Emily Zemler***

PLANES ON PAPER

YAKIMA, WASH.

Hope for the Less Hopeful

"We're '60s folk for a less hopeful decade," says guitarist **Navid Eliot**, who, along with singer **Jen Borst**, comprises the Yakima, Wash.-based **Planes on Paper**. "We're writing in a different, but similarly politically difficult decade." Eliot and Borst met by happenstance in 2012 when they found themselves playing support roles in the same five-person band. When that group broke up, the pair decided to record an EP for booking purposes. That demo spread and eventually earned reviews, local radio play and more than 1,000 fans eager to buy that low-key affair for themselves. After re-pressing the original recording, the duo laid down another set of songs to release as an official studio EP. Their first single, "Iron Boat," got airtime on KEXP and WNYU, leading to more sales, more downloads and a national listenership. Their most recent single, "Television," even prompted an invite to perform at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. "['Television'] is a political one," says Eliot. "We have romantic ideas about folk music, and its power to influence, so [we felt that] the time to release a song about the hideous communication breakdown [in a marriage] and political divide we're all witnessing is not *next* year. It's right now." Their upcoming album *Edge Markings*, although recorded with a band, maintains the duo in the forefront and explores the greater questions about life, nationalism and religion in a way that never veers toward the self-indulgent or histrionic. "Our songs stay within what we know to be true, and that is our own emotions and experiences," says Eliot. "We're not experts on politics, but we feel qualified to speak on how they make us feel, and hope that we aren't alone in those feelings; maybe we'll find comfort in sharing our fears and grief, and maybe someone listening will find comfort in that too. Seems like a win-win."

planesonpaper.com ***Sonia Weiser***

Nirav Patel (Planes on Paper)

JUANITA STEIN

MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

Land of the Free

Australian singer-songwriter **Juanita Stein** has been at the helm of rock outfit Howling Bells for over a decade but, in the summer of 2017, she shifted her focus, releasing her debut solo album, *America*. "We've been playing almost 12-13 years together," Stein says, reflecting on her time with Howling Bells. "In any relationship, you feel like there comes a time where you might need a breather, to take time out for yourself." And while the solo record diverges somewhat from what Stein calls the "darker, grittier" aesthetic of Howling Bells' music, her vocal performance is still at the forefront, showing a range that stretches from husky ballads to light, lilting odes. The overall ethos of the album, as hinted at by the title, serves as a paean to the American spirit at a time when belief in such a thing may be waning. "I never sat down and attempted to access the American canon; it's just something that I grew up with. And it was only after I finished the record that it dawned on me that, in some way, every song on that record was a direct cultural tribute to America," Stein explains, noting how her songwriter father instilled in her a reverence for international-yet-American-leaning groups like The Band and Fleetwood Mac, along with a reluctant love for one of his favorite American poets, Bob Dylan. "I thought [Dylan] was a whiny, moaning, boring, old fart, and I just couldn't get my head around why my father spent so many hours dedicated to this guy," Stein says. "Having said that, now, I'm obsessed with him."

www.juanitastein.com ***Matt Inman***

MAPACHE

GLENDALE, CALIF.

SoCal Cosmic Americana

Built on a friendship formed as teens hanging in the SoCal surfing/skating scene, **Mapache** (pronounced mah-PAH-chay) rises out of San Fernando Valley suburbia. Stressing songwriting that draws on much of their own life experience, and vocal harmonies inspired by luminaries such as The Louvin Brothers and Crosby, Stills & Nash, the cosmic Americana duo of **Clay Finch** and **Sam Blasucci** is quite conscious of their place in a long musical tradition. From a palette of beach and Latin sounds that stretch across Los Angeles to notable country and folk contributions from throwback icons like The Byrds and The Flying Burrito Brothers, Mapache looks for the links. "We like to weave together influences of Western music from Mexican and Spanish influences to Hawaiian and cowboy music," says Finch. "There are ways all of those are connected." Other connections, like the support of guitarist Neal Casal (Chris Robinson Brotherhood) and GospelbeacH's Brent Rademaker led them to producer Dan Horne and a session at North Hollywood's famed Valentine Recording Studios. Their self-titled debut glistens with acoustic and resonator guitars and sibling-tight voices illuminating lyrics of broken-down Cadillacs and stories from south of the border. Much of the album reflects Blasucci's two years of missionary work in Mexico, including the homage to "Saltillo" and the Spanish-sung "Aquellos Ojos Verdes." Yet, his renewed friendship with Finch is the most affecting. "Everything that I've learned musically that's been important has come from jamming with Clay," says Blasucci. Recently closing out a national tour and soon to be starting another, the musicians confess that they are likely on the verge of being dismissed from their respective day jobs. And, while they may consider augmenting their twosome to include more instrumentation—possibly adding pedal steel—at the moment, they're content to work as a duo. As Finch says, "There's something special about that."

mapachesounds.bandcamp.com ***Larson Sutton***

RELIX DIGITAL SAMPLER

Download the tracks for free at relix.com/downloads

1 The Dead-Set Fun-Nuggets

"Saturday Night Feel Good"
From the album *IMakestuff-forfun*
Hi-Art

Hailing from down under, The DEAD-SET FUN-NUGGETS spawned from a musical midlife crisis. What happens when you cross Bob Weir with James Brown and Jason Crosby, add a drum-circle and a dash of Zappa? Listen and find out.

deadsetband.com
imakestuffforfun.com

2 Rainbow Girls

"It's A Slow Ride (for now)"
From the album *American Dream*
Self-Released

Rainbow Girls are a group of songwriters, multi-instrumentalists, and California natives. Their new, socially conscious LP, American Dream, explores the impact of 21st century movements like Black Lives Matter and the protests at Standing Rock.

rainbowgirlsmusic.com

3 Bonerama

"Paranoid Android"
From the album *Hot Like Fire*
Basin Street Records

Entering their 20th year, Bonerama is viewed by some as one of the most genuine, unique and interesting bands to come from the Crescent City, incorporating brass, funk, soul, rock, blues and alternative into their one-of-a-kind sound. Three trombones, plus sousaphone, guitar and drums all deliver powerful sounds that you have to hear to believe.

boneramabrass.com

4 Railway Gamblers

"Day by Day"
From the album *Lover*
Self-Released

Railway Gamblers are a Cosmic Americana group from the Southside of Chicago. Using jangle-infused guitar melodies and resonant percussive elements, the group channels a modernized folk rock sound. Highlighted by poignant lyrics, each song is crafted with palatable instrumentation and a relatable story for all listeners.

railwaygamblers.com

5 Annachristie Sapphire

"Cut The Line"
From the album *Desert Car*
Self-Released

Annachristie's voice has a soulful huskiness and power that could break glass. Her compelling songwriting lends itself to an emotionally evocative experience, exploring measures of folk and Americana by marrying the genres with elements of grunge and dreamy soundscapes. Enjoy the first single from her upcoming release due summer 2018.

annachristiemusic.com

6 3rd Ear Experience

"The Drone"
From the album *Stoned Gold*
Space Rock Productions

3rd Ear Experience are a space rock jamband out of Joshua Tree, California. These desert dwellers are specialists at blending psychedelic rock with world music. Soaked in freeform jams, the music drifts and wanders like incense smoke through a kaleidoscope of mystical atmospheres.

spacerockproductions.com

7 Blake Gardner & The Farmers

"Feelin' Fine"
Single
Own Grown Productions

Blake Gardner & The Farmers break free from being defined by mixing together elements of blues, reggae, hip-hop, funk, and nearly everything else under the sun. Although BGatF calls Columbia, Missouri home, influences from all around can be heard in their eclectic mix of jams.

owngrownproductions.com

8 Max Reaven & The Pupils of Groove

"Fubar > Here I Am > CHAOS"
From the album *Pupils of Groove*
Self-Released

Offering up his groove-oriented original music + lyrics, comes Singer/Songwriter/GuitarSlinger, Max Reaven from Akron, OH. Joining him, out from a long tenure with ekoostik hookah, the low end mastery that is Cliff Starbuck. Max Edick on Kit. Debut album this Spring!

pupilsofgroove.com

9 The Lark and the Loon

"Turn Yourself Around"
From the album *Songbirds and Fog*
Self-Released

The Lark and the Loon are a songwriting duo consisting of Jeff Rolfzen and Rocky Steen-Rolfzen. The two bring their distinct writing styles together in what they call an exploration in the etymology of American music. *Songbirds and Fog*, their debut album, was recorded in their Ozark cabin home.

thelarkandtheloon.com

10 Deathlist

"Charm School"
From the album *Fun*
Self-Released

Drawing inspiration from bygone poets of dour adolescence like the Cure and Suicide, Deathlist constructs a goth-tinged, post-punk dreamscapes of blunt drum machines, throbbing bass and sharp guitars, all of it ultimately in service to Logan's voice, a haunted instrument capable of channeling anger and sorrow into a single breath.

deathlist.bandcamp.com

11 Floodlore

"Maybe Dead"
From the album *When it was Forged*
Self-Released

Floodlore is a hard rock trio from Northern Virginia. Currently, they are working on their second full length album, When It Was Forged. A grassroots project, the new record is being crafted with care (all recording and artwork done by the band themselves). They gig regularly in the DC area, and are known for their high-energy live jams.

floodlore.bandcamp.com

12 The Yeti Trio

"The Diminutive Bob Legweak"
From the ablum *Wannee 2013*
Self-Released

The Yeti Trio plays frightening fusion. Founded in 1998, they evolved from complete improvisation to a blend of free and complex elements. The current lineup consists of Eric Sanders (drums, Fiji Mariners), Brooks Smith (keys, The Grapes), and Vaylor Trucks (guitar, Butch Trucks and the Freight Train Band).

theyetitrio.com

For more information about how to appear on the digital sampler, please contact Connor@relix.com.

WOMAN AT WORK

EMILY WOLFE

Heroes and Holy Rollers

EMILY WOLFE'S recent single "Holy Roller" was written over two years ago, but the rollicking, bluesy track has a notable immediacy. Based in Austin, Texas, Wolfe was inspired to pen the song after encountering men in the music industry who didn't treat her as an equal. She grew tired of guys who cared more about their careers than hers and decided to express it the best way she knew how—with an electric guitar and some lyrics.

"I wrote the song so I could get the energy out of my body and I wouldn't have to hold onto it anymore," Wolfe says. "It's called 'Holy Roller' because the men I worked with in the past, who weren't the greatest men, tended to speak opinion as if it were gospel. Initially, I wrote it based on my personal experiences with inequality but, over time, it became about the issue on a global scale—which is pretty incredible timing."

For Wolfe, the song is part of a focus on creating rock tunes with a message. "Holy Roller" isn't the self-taught guitarist's first release—she has an EP and a few singles out already—but it feels like a new chapter. "When I first started out, it took me a while to learn that a good song has a strong message," she says. "I've grown to the learn that if I put something out, it's gotta really be clear. This was my first real go-around with wanting to say something important."

Even while maintaining her focus on writing new singles in time for a 2018 record, Wolfe continues touring. When the musician is penning new music, she always considers its potential impact onstage. "I love playing live so much," she says. "I want to put everything I have into it. If I can get out the emotions I want to get out of my body in a song, then the audience will have something to connect with that's real. So a lot of my songs are based on me wanting to connect with audiences live."

The 27 year old's favorite part of playing live is being able to let go and unleash her emotions and energy through her guitar work, which is heavy and impressive. "I love being aggressive onstage," Wolfe laughs. "It's so much fun to shock people and take them by surprise."

Emily Zemler

MAN AT WORK

JARED SCHARFF

Live From New York

YOU MAY NOT KNOW the name Jared Scharff, but you've probably seen his face. For over a decade, the guitarist and songwriter has served as a member of the *Saturday Night Live* house band at Studio 8H in New York's 30 Rockefeller Plaza—opening and closing the long-standing NBC comedy show every episode, often providing supporting music for sketches and even, at times, playing with the musical guests and hosts.

In addition to his 11 years working with *SNL*, which is currently in its 43rd season, the guitarist recently unveiled a new solo project, Pearl Lion; his debut under the moniker is a double EP, *Light and Dark*. The dichotomous efforts, Scharff explains, display the two vastly different sides of his compositional ambitions, with the "Light" side offering airier tunes, while the "Dark" contrasts with a hard-hitting attack.

"I was creating these intense things and I was creating these mellow things," he says. "I wanted to pursue both sides and not have to worry about making some sort of album arc. So, the idea is that these are an album together; they just happen to be two separate EPs. They're like the yin and the yang."

One of the album's singles, "NYC," is a shredding, grimy, pounding ode to the city that shaped Scharff. The track is paired with an equally sense-assaulting video that shows off both the beautiful and seedy parts of the Big Apple.

"This is my world," Scharff says, reminiscing of his childhood spent living outside the city and his sojourns into Manhattan for concerts and, eventually, college at NYU. "I've lived and been all over—Brooklyn, Upper West Side, East Village."

He even landed a gig playing at New York Rangers hockey games after sending Madison Square Garden's organist and production team a video from his "Unnecessary Shredding" YouTube series, where he wore a Rangers jersey. Scharff, who came of age playing the New York jamband incubator Wetlands with his old band Velvet Frogg, has also used his MSG spot to honor an early influence, Phish, by jamming on "Tweezer Reprise" between periods. (After checking out a Baker's Dozen show this summer, he will occasionally wear a jacket adorned with Jon Fishman's trademark donut-shaped symbol at games.)

But even with his connection to the *SNL* institution, Scharff is looking to strike out on his own with Pearl Lion, making music without a predecessor or blueprint, and the new EPs are just the beginning.

"The 'Light' and 'Dark' thing was my first go at this," he says. "But I don't want to repeat myself. There hasn't been something quite like this, musically. And it's getting crazier."

Matt Inman

Whitney Hensley (Wolfe)

OF ANGELS AND EPHEMERAL CASTLES

The Spin Doctors frontman is still a day (and night) dream believer. By **CHRIS BARRON**

WE'RE ALL dreamers, aren't we?

The philosopher, René Descartes, proposes that we cannot be certain our entire existence is not, in fact, a dream. Science is quite positive that people who do not remember their dreams are, nevertheless, dreaming.

I generally dream my ass off.

A long time ago, someone told me that if you have a dream, then write it down. The more you write down your dreams, the more dreams you remember.

It's true.

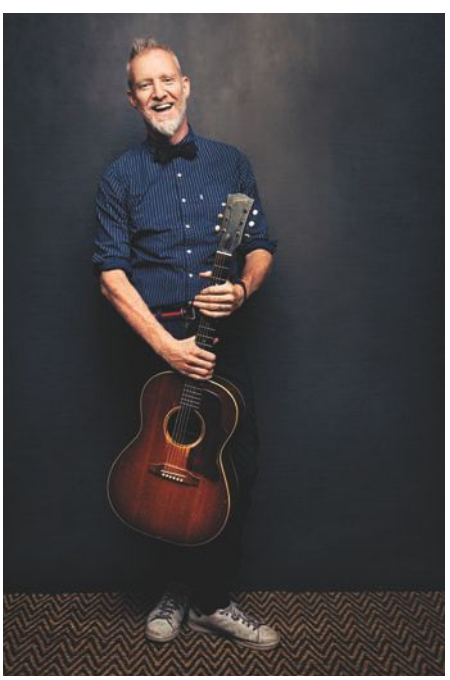
I've come to view writing dreams down as a writing exercise unto itself. I wake up in the middle of the night, turn on my machine and type out my mind-movies with my eyes closed. (The screen hurts my eyes.)

Obviously, I'm a creative person. However, I see myself more as a shuffler of words and a wrestler of meaning than a raw creator. My skill as a songwriter (and, I hope, as a poet) is really in discovering a theme and constructing the language around it, teasing words and phrases into ephemeral castles that are held together by an architecture of ideas that have a logic unto themselves.

For example, in the song "Till the Cows Come Home" from my new solo record, *Angels and One-Armed Jugglers*, the bridge and final verse are trying to convey that, despite all the flaws and unfairness in this world, the benediction of love, over time, gives more than adequate consolation. I use imagery from ordinary life to show my meaning in the way that a carpenter might cut wood to make a cabinet or a bedstead:

This faulty world is full of what makes us weep
We tend to trip when we try to leap
But still this life is not wholly without its charms
If we must fall, let's fall into each other's arms

Parades go by
Moons cross the sky
The moments will have flown
That I love you
I'll whisper through
The silver hair
The wind has blown
And if I hadn't said
You never may have known
I will love you
Till the cows come home



On the other hand, here is one of my dreams:

I'm at this furnace for glass that burns wood. It's shaped like a beehive and lava is coming out of it. I have on these little white sneakers and I'm afraid I'm getting burned, so I take off one of the sneakers and look. There are blue and red crystals coming out of my foot and I'm not surprised at all.

...I mean, *what?*

Here's an excerpt from another:

I'm doing a gig and there's this other act. It is a woman with dark eyes and curly black hair who takes a few dozen beautiful women over to a small rise in a huge lawn of green, green grass and lays on her back with strings on her toes that connect her with each of the girls, who are standing on each other's shoulders, fanned out above her, and she plays them like an organ, manipulating them with the strings on her toes. Throughout the performance, sprinklers are wetting them all. The sound is mesmerizing, heartrending. The women are singing but there are other sounds like pipes, high and low, and it's impossible to understand how the music is being made only by the motions of the dark-eyed woman's toes. The performance ends and we speak briefly to the dark-eyed lady and ask her how her instrument worked. "I'll explain later," she says.

Who is this guy? I mean... it's me, right?

I had a dream where I was in a basement with a bunch of junkies and a song came on. This song was the best song I ever heard. In the dream, I start crying because it's so beautiful and true.

I ask this teen derelict laying next to me on the broken concrete, "Who is this?"

"What?" he says.

"This song?"

"You never heard this?" he asks and I wake.

So like, did I write that song? I suppose I did. I wish I could remember it.

Another example:

I'm in a movie. There's a big party. I'm talking to Ray Liotta who plays a cop who had one of the electric gizmos go off in his face when a radical sabotaged it. I ask him how many holes he has in him. There are many. His shirt is off. We're in a '50s hospital that's also an interrogation room with some other dark, hard gumshoes silently sitting by as we talk. "Tell me something," I say, and I point to a big nail that's coming out of him. "Is that part of you or part of what they've done to you?" He says, "I feel different now." I look him in the eyes and I say, "That's because this thing took you to the line between the life we're living here and now and whatever it is that comes after. Our eyes are locked and I know I'm walking a thin line but we understand each other now.

It's pretty easy to chalk up the huge, submerged oddness of our inner selves to some facile, preexisting thought process like a religion, or half thought through ideas about the subconscious. I don't pretend to know what's going on with dreams. I just like the fact that, deep in my mind, I'm way weirder than I could be if I tried.

Chris Barron is the Spin Doctors' co-founder and lead singer. He released his latest solo album, Angels and One-Armed Jugglers, *in October on Chrysanthemum Records. The LP arrived shortly after Barron recovered from vocal cord paralysis.*

STS9

Bassist Alana Rocklin and percussionist Jeffree Lerner offer a "deeper understanding" of their veteran livetronica group's first 20 years. *By* **MIKE GREENHAUS**

20 YEARS LATER

ALANA ROCKLIN: We wanted to kick off our anniversary at Morrison, Colo.'s Red Rocks in September and celebrate into 2018—to commemorate where the band's been, what we've done and, of course, playing [2005's electro-improv classic] *Artifact* is a big part of that. It was a joy for all of us to go back and learn to play it with one another; it's something that carried us through that last tour as well. We also did our own art gallery during the Red Rocks run, and that was a big part of the anniversary, too. We tried to share some of our history through our art, pictures and these special moments.

Oct. 3 was the date that everybody remembered as the 20th anniversary, so we thought it would be fun to play *Artifact* again in a grimy club [Knoxville, Tenn.'s The Mill & Mine] and have this smaller, more intimate dance party. We surprised everybody in a classy way and gave out pamphlets when everyone walked in that said what we were going to do.

JEFFREE LERNER: We like to dub it the "first 20 years." The overall variety and vibe of where we're at is so creative and inspired. We are trying to find ways to let our fans in a little bit and show them this historical perspective. It's mind-blowing to think that we've had this honor of creating music and traveling and sharing our art for 20 years. We take that more seriously now than we ever have.

UNCOVERED *ARTIFACT*

JL: *Artifact* was the *first* album we've chosen to do; it definitely holds a lot of great memories for us as the creators, and the feedback we've gotten from fans has revealed how much that album means to them. Playing it was challenging for us in a different way, too. Only a handful of those songs were in rotation and, some, we'd never played live or with Alana [who joined in 2014]. It's a goal of ours to really increase our repertoire—to be able to play everything we put out on one of our albums.

AR: We didn't want to look at it as, "Let's play it top to bottom, note for note." We wanted to play it in a way that was reflective of where we are as a band. We'd never played "Peoples part II" or "Native End" electric. And we did "Music, Us" totally differently.

ANOTHER NEW DAY

AR: We have so much new material. Last February, we built a studio in Santa Cruz, Calif. We've had so much fun working in the studio, whether its things like "Real & Imagined" that have been sitting on a drive waiting for us to finish or just free improvising. We're really interested in releasing music in more of a piece-by-piece, single format because it suits how we're feeling right now, which is just working on a lot of different music and remixes. Everything's wide open now.

The Universe Inside was an album that we *had* to make, a mission—we had to finish it, and we started some of that material the first day we ever played together when I joined. "New Dawn, New Day" was a song that we wrote together from the get-go as a means to communicate what we were feeling. And then there were some songs that [the rest of the band] had been working on for a while, like "Out of This World." Now we're free to work on what we feel like.

ALANA AND EVERYTHING AFTER

JL: The improvisational aspect of our performance is maturing. We are working to create spaces for improvisation within structured songs; we want a balance. There isn't one song we play the same since Alana joined the band. She's brought herself 100 percent into this group. We didn't go, "Alana, here's a song—let's go play it!" We woodshed them all during our practices—went through every song and shortened sections or lengthened sections. We flushed our repertoire and refined it. Simplifying has been a big lesson from all of that. Even in the songwriting, we are really boiling everything down to what's really needed. We are excited to get up to some mountain and ski towns in January—the energy up there is pretty crazy. And now we're looking forward to some big summer festivals and our next Red Rocks show. [We're] also trying to put together a fest of our own, though that might be another year away.

AR: As a fan, I like to say I have a pretty deep knowledge of the repertoire, but it's not like when I joined I said, "Hey guys, remember this song?" When we started playing together officially, we took six weeks and just went through everything, studying the way songs like "Moonsocket" have changed like jazz tunes. Then, we went back and discussed it as a group and said, "What works? What do we want to change?"

GETTING AXED

AR: We've taken "Axe the Cables" to a different place than where it started—it turned into a jazz quintet. The first one I was a part of at Red Rocks was interesting because I had just joined the band and I was renting a house that had a beautiful grand piano. And then [guitarist] Hunter Brown would come over and he would play with us. And it was a very organic way of breaking the songs down, which reveals the songwriting. You might think, "How can I play a song like 'Vapors' without the electronic elements in it?" It's been fun for us to loosen the range a little bit on what "Axe" can be, so that we could just explore this whole different approach.

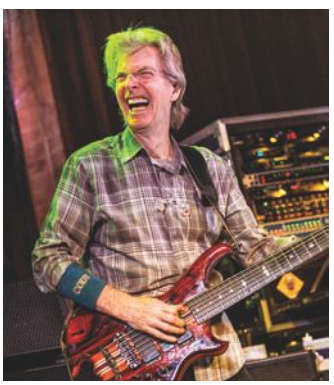
BOB MINKIN
The Music Never Stopped

Longtime *Relix* contributor Bob Minkin has just released a new book of music photography. *The Music Never Stopped* collects over 500 never-before-seen images of the Marin County music scene—past and present. The members of the Grateful Dead are featured prominently in the work, along with Hot Tuna, Steve Kimock, David Nelson Band, New Riders of the Purple Sage, ALO and many more. Minkin's latest offering is available exclusively online at themusicneverstoppedbook.com.

Bob Weir and Natascha Münter

SWEETWATER MUSIC HALL, MILL VALLEY, CALIF., 12/15/13

On the way home from Neal Schon's wedding, Bob and his wife Natascha stopped by Steve Kimock's show at Sweetwater. Jerry Garcia's "Wolf" guitar was also on hand for the night.



Phil Lesh

TERRAPIN CROSSROADS, SAN RAFAEL, CALIF., 7/16/15

Since it opened its doors in 2012, Terrapin Crossroads—Phil Lesh's home away from home—has established itself as one of the Bay Area's premier music venues. Featuring music in the bar every night, brunch shows on the weekend and a newly opened outdoor venue, "The Backyard," it's a musical smorgasbord. (Phil frequently sits in with the bands that play there.) More than just a music venue, Terrapin Crossroads has become the center of a community of Deadheads and those wanting to hear some of the best live jam music being played today.

Phil Lesh

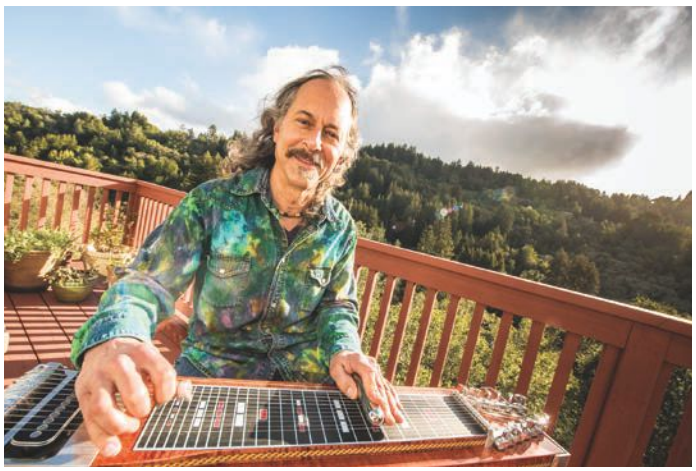
TERRAPIN CROSSROADS, SAN RAFAEL, CALIF., 6/12/15

Phil's grandson Levon wandered onstage before the show, much to the delight of everyone, especially Phil.

Jerry Garcia and Phil Lesh

THE PAVILION, FAIRFAX, CALIF., 8/22/81

This tiny rec hall hosted one of the few shows that Phil Lesh played with the Jerry Garcia Band. The gig, whiched was billed as Jerry Garcia's "Birthday Benefit," helped out the Fairfax school district and featured lots of balloons. Cake was served to everyone.



Barry Sless

FAIRFAX, CALIF., 2/22/17

One of my favorite musicians, Barry plays in a number of groups including David Nelson Band, California Kind and Moonalice. We brought his pedal steel out on his deck to capture the beautiful light and fog rolling in.

Move Me Brightly – Celebrating Jerry Garcia's 70th Birthday

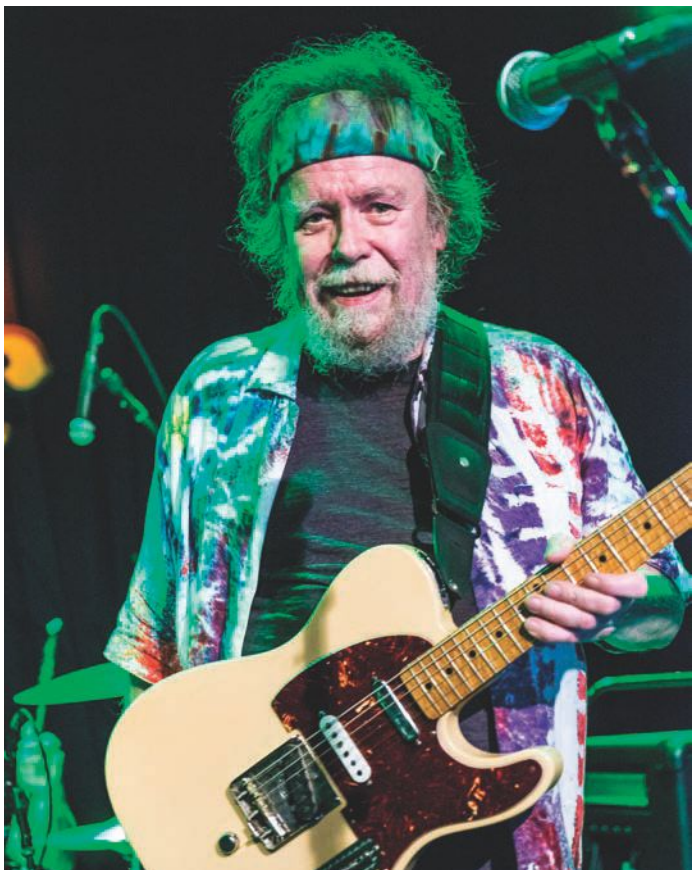
TRI STUDIOS, SAN RAFAEL, CALIF., 8/3/12

The ultimate playpen for musicians, TRI Studios is a state-of-the-art multimedia performance studio conceived by Bob Weir. This event was a five-hour concert honoring Jerry Garcia. Led by Bob Weir, the show featured a rotating lineup of musicians like Donna Jean Godchaux-MacKay, Mike Gordon and Neal Casal. I was the house photographer at TRI and it was a privilege to be able to capture these events.

Steve Kimock and Bob Weir

MILL VALLEY, CALIF., 5/19/17

I treasure being able to capture intimate moments like this when I'm a fly on the wall. Here, Bob and Steve are working out some tunes before playing a benefit show at a private home.



Stu Allen

SOMEWHERE OVER MARIN COUNTY, CALIF., 8/3/10

I've always wanted to fly. In 1997, I earned my private pilot certificate and, ever since then, I've loved getting up in the air with my friends, some of whom are musicians. My ride is a 1968 Piper Cherokee 180 that lives at Marin County Airport.

David Nelson, New Riders of the Purple Sage

SWEETWATER MUSIC HALL, MILL VALLEY, CALIF., 10/30/15

The first concert I photographed was the New Riders of the Purple Sage at New York City's Academy of Music in 1974. Here, 41 years later, I continued to document this great band.

GARY PEACOCK

A bit of beginner's luck—six decades later *By* **JEFF TAMARKIN**

GARY Peacock didn't start out playing the double bass. But, one day, fate paid a visit. "When I was in the military, I had a quintet: trumpet, saxophone, piano, bass, drums," says the jazz legend, whose initial instruments were piano and drums. "The bass player got married and said he couldn't play at night anymore. The drummer in that band was Red Holt, from the Ramsey Lewis Trio. He said, 'You play the bass and I'll find a new piano player.' I said, 'Red, I don't want to play the fuckin' bass. I want to play the piano.' So it was either stop the quintet or keep it going and go to the bass."

Peacock chose to keep it going and, more than six decades later, he's still at it. *Tangents*, his latest album for ECM—the label for which he's recorded since the 1970s—is as masterful as anything he's done before. The second release by Peacock's trio, featuring pianist Marc Copland and drummer Joey Baron, the LP includes several original compositions (five credited solely to Peacock) plus covers of Miles Davis' "Blue in Green" and Alex North's theme from the film *Spartacus*.

"I've enjoyed playing with Marc for the last 30 years, off and on," says Peacock. "We immediately recognized a kinship, a mutual ground. We were always looking for the perfect drummer and, two or three years ago, the three of us got together for he first time at [New York's] Birdland. I knew that everyone was on the same page at the same time."

Like most ECM releases, *Tangents* was produced by the label's German founder, Manfred Eicher, for whom Peacock has nothing but praise. "Manfred is always listening for the essence of what's there, or what's possible," he says. "He might make a suggestion or he might not. Or he might say, 'Let's continue.' The value of Manfred is that he has ears. He really can hear when the shit is happening. He listens for that, and if it isn't happening, then he would probably encourage us to move on or try something different. But just the fact that he listens makes a big difference. He's the only producer I know who I can always trust. If I go in, I know that he's going to get the sound of my instrument. He actually listens to what the instrument sounds like."

That sound has contributed to vital music by a plethora of jazz giants since the '60s. In addition to his output as a leader—more than a dozen albums to date—Peacock's résumé boasts an impressive body of work as a sideman and core bandmember, particularly the 20 or so recordings he's made with pianist Keith Jarrett and drummer Jack DeJohnette. The Standards Trio, as they're unofficially known, has been responsible for some of the most durable entries in the ECM catalog. Peacock has also worked with trios led by the late greats Bill Evans and Paul Bley.

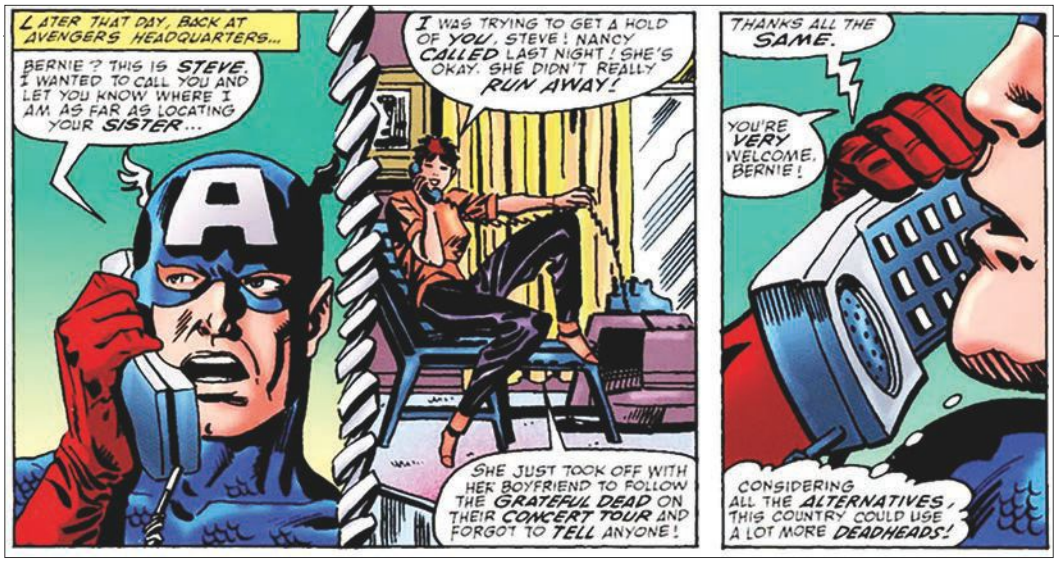
"If you have a piano, you have a harmonic aspect," he says, explaining his affection for the piano trio configuration. "That immediately impacts whoever's improvising in such a way that a person could play something that, by itself, does not offer that much interest or exuberance. But in context with the harmonic background, it will bring it to life. It will give it more substance."

However, Peacock says he rarely listens to music he's made in the past—he's more interested in what's on his calendar today. "Music, at least in my life, has been an opportunity to be present," he says. "If I go back and listen to something that I did with Keith and Jack, or with Paul [Bley] or [saxophonist] Albert Ayler, one of the values is learning where I might have erred. Maybe I was playing and lost my attention. So it's valuable in that sense—a way of re-orienting my direction in playing. But I don't think I've ever had an interest in finding something different or new either," he adds. "It's more aspiring toward a particular internal space that you can hear, but that you can't really define—you can't teach it, you can't learn it. You have to listen and be available. And you have to get out of the way."

Now 82, the Idaho-born musician says that he doesn't have any desire to stop. Once asked why he keeps going, he famously responded, "It's none of my business." What did Peacock mean by that? "If you spend enough time by yourself and you ask that question: 'Why am I still playing?' then you can come up with all kinds of answers," he says. "They're all reasons that don't mean shit. You have to start listening from a different place when you ask that question. For me, it's none of my fucking business."

Perhaps the answer is because he feels that he still has much to learn about playing the bass? "Oh, yeah," he says with a laugh when asked if he's still discovering new aspects of the instrument. "The spirit that's the most dominant is maintaining, encouraging and nurturing the beginner's mind. That has always been a source of inspiration—the fact that there's so much that I can't know—ever."

© Caterina di Perri / ECM Records


LATER THAT DAY, BACK AT AVENGERS HEADQUARTERS...
BERNIE ? THIS IS STEVE. I WANTED TO CALL YOU AND LET YOU KNOW WHERE I AM. AS FAR AS LOCATING YOUR SISTER...
I WAS TRYING TO GET A HOLD OF YOU, STEVE ! NANCY CALLED LAST NIGHT ! SHE'S OKAY. SHE DIDN'T REALLY RUN AWAY!
SHE JUST TOOK OFF WITH HER BOYFRIEND TO FOLLOW THE GRATEFUL DEAD ON THEIR CONCERT TOUR AND FORGOT TO TELL ANYONE!
THANKS ALL THE SAME.
YOU'RE VERY WELCOME, BERNIE!
CONSIDERING ALL THE ALTERNATIVES, THIS COUNTRY COULD USE A LOT MORE DEADHEADS!

CAPTAIN AMERICA DIGS DEADHEADS

A look at the long, strange kinship of Marvel Comics and the Grateful Dead

By **DEAN BUDNICK**

ISSUE NO. 355 OF *Captain America* (July 1989) opens with Cap sitting in his executive office on Avengers Island where he laments, "Some Avengers leader I turned out to be. Since taking command of this outfit, I've been doing as much paperwork as Avenging!"

In the midst of sorting through these tasks, Peggy Carter, the former S.H.I.E.L.D. agent who has been assisting the group with administrative duties, informs him of "a call on line seven from a Ms. Bernadette Rosenthal." Cap agrees to speak with her, although he acknowledges some misgivings. (She is a former girlfriend who had proposed to him before their relationship dissipated.) He had first met her in the guise of his alter ego Steve Rogers, and later endangered her life by revealing his secret identity.

Rosenthal, who subsequently left town to enter law school—years later, she would defend Cap's former partner, Bucky Barnes, The Winter Solider—reveals that she has contacted him hoping that he could locate her younger sister Nancy, who ran away from home a month earlier. Cap promises to investigate and soon discovers that other teenagers have seemingly disappeared as of late. He decides to go undercover and enlists Sersi, one of the Eternals, to turn him into a 17-year-old version of himself.

He then makes his way to New York City's Port Authority Bus Terminal, where the incognito Captain America is hypnotized and kidnapped by the villainous Sisters of Sin. They transport him via a bus along with other lost teens to Camp Rage (which, to modern ears, sounds like a destination weekend with the band Lettuce, but carries far more nefarious connotations in this setting). While at the camp, criminal masterminds Mother Night and Minister Blood instruct the teenagers to channel the power of hate.

This story arc concludes in issue No. 357 after Captain America spontaneously returns to his previous size, which enables him to defeat the Sisters of Sin and liberate the young people. On the final page of the story, Captain calls Bernie with an update, explaining that he still hasn't found her sister. She interrupts him to inform Cap that Nancy hasn't actually run away, but instead, "She just took off with her boyfriend to follow the Grateful Dead on their concert tour and forgot to tell anyone."

Captain America is heartened by this news and says to himself: "Considering all the alternatives, this country could use a lot more Deadheads."

These two panels, which would seem destined for T-shirts—or at least bootleg lot gear—raise an intriguing question: Was anyone at Marvel a Deadhead, and what are the origins of the Nancy Rosenthal as a touring Deadhead subplot?

In the process of considering this, it's worth noting that Jerry Garcia was a longtime comic book fan. While growing up in the 1940s and '50s, he was an avid consumer of EC comics, describing this enthusiasm as "one of the ways I got into reading." EC, which is best known for its horror titles such as *Tales From the Crypt,* received a series of public rebukes in 1954 during the congressional hearings into juvenile delinquency that vilified the industry, following the publication of psychiatrist Fredric Wertham's book *Seduction of the Innocent*. Eventually, EC publisher William Gaines stopped producing comics altogether, focusing instead on his new magazine, *Mad*.

Nearly four decades later, Garcia characterized EC as "the Grateful Dead of the '50s," noting that the obsessive mail in the back of each issue demonstrated that "their fans are like Deadheads." As one of these individuals himself, he expressed his ongoing fascination with the classic EC comics titles, singling out many of the writers and artists by name, including: Wally Wood, Jack Davis, Bill Elder, Bernie Krigstein and Graham J. Ingels. (Garcia raved that Ingels' work, with its heavy use of shadows, is akin to a German expressionist film.)

Ken Viola, the Dead's longtime head of security, recalls, "Garcia and I were big comic-book readers. I remember he told me that when he first got money, he bought a complete collection of EC. I read those, but I also read Marvel Comics when they were Atlas, due to the work of Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko, so I was in at the beginning of the early '60s superhero thing."

Garcia remained such a lifelong comics fan that, in 1991, he prompted crewmember Bill "Kidd" Candelario, who often focused on the band's merchandise, to develop *Grateful Dead Comix*. Candelario recalls, "Jerry volunteered me to do a lot of stuff over the years that I wouldn't have otherwise done. In this case, we brought in [Robert] Hunter, who was skeptical at first, but then he saw how someone like Tim Truman was interpreting his lyrics. The 'Dire Wolf' art is amazing." Garcia set the project in motion and later helped select the artists for the

Continued on page 77

© Marvel

ART GARFUNKEL

Simon & Garfunkel's sweet-voiced "other half" tells his side of the story with an adventurous new handwritten retrospective.

By **MIKE GREENHAUS**

"OUR LIVES ARE ALL about the experiences that we fall into," Art Garfunkel says as he thinks back to the origins of his out-of-the-box quasi-memoir, *What Is It All but Luminous: Notes From an Underground Man*. "We stay with them if we like them, and then—months later or years later—some project you fell into has been completed. And now it has an existence, and you're obliged to talk about its intentions, its beginnings."

Landing somewhere between an autobiography, a travelogue and a collection of poetic musings, *What Is It All but Luminous* is, more than anything else, a look into the 76-year-old Garfunkel's creative psyche and artistic process. The book's roots date back almost 40 years to when the erstwhile Simon & Garfunkel singer decided to walk across Japan. In 1983, he started his journey across America, heading from his New York apartment, through Central Park, past his alma mater Columbia University and into New Jersey.

Garfunkel staged around three walks a year for over a decade—often armed with his Walkman and sometimes staying in two-star motels—and ultimately completed his cross-country trek in September 1997, before turning his attention to a similar quest in Europe. His observations serve as the springboard for *What Is It All but Luminous*, but the intimate volume is also spliced with playlists, book recommendations, inspirational quotes, notes on his time as a math teacher and, of course, reflections on his often turbulent relationship with Paul Simon.

What Is It All but Luminous arrives at the crest of Garfunkel's current comeback. In 2010, after Garfunkel's last tour with Paul Simon, he was diagnosed with vocal cord paralysis. Though he managed to overcome his ailments, Garfunkel's relationship with Simon soured and the duo has not shared the stage in almost eight years. However, Garfunkel returned to active touring as a solo act, focusing on intimate rooms like New York's City Winery that allow for stripped-down performances and storytelling. Reflecting the personal nature of Garfunkel's current state, *What Is It All but Luminous*' text is presented in a digitized version of his handwriting.

"I'm writing about who I am," he says during some downtime while on his fall book tour. "None of us know who we are. I've been a little under the radar. I'm that guy over Paul Simon's right shoulder. So you finally want to say to the audience, 'Here's what makes me cook. Here's the nature of my fortunate life.' And as you reveal yourself to them, you reveal yourself to yourself. I saw certain things that came up on Page 175 that really come right out of Page 42. And I realized, 'Oh, that's the young me turning into *that* me.'"

***What Is It All but Luminous* falls in the space between an autobiography, a travelogue and poetic snapshots. At what point did the book take that form?**

I keep a notebook in my back pocket, and since I have walked across America and Europe, I have had a lot of time to think. It's the things you do when you're a rock star and your glory years are behind you—now you're raising a family, but you're still creative. I started following certain phrases that came into my head and would go, "There's a grabber; that's a wonderful commercial opening line." I would think, "Am I old and jaded, or did the world just all go flat? Once, you were an icon if you made it. Now I wonder about words like that."

I've been thinking about that theme my whole life, and I wanted to finally say it succinctly. And so you're off and running and, for the next 12 hours, you're completely wrapped up with how to express this with sentences that have a rhythm; with inflections and accents on the words so that there's a dance, with a rhyme that's subtle and internal. And you play the game of fixing, polishing, erasing—until you like what you did. You end up with a prose poem that's maybe a minute long.

I've been doing that for 30 years now, and it's been just a private thing—I never thought I was writing to anybody. I was just bit by inspiration, and I had to follow. And I'm a creative cat, so it's a real pleasure to fashion these little things. I finally decided to get an agent and shop around my writings, and I got a great reaction. All the different publishers were offering me nice prices. So I thought, "I guess I'm a writer!" You're concerned when you find that these publishers all want to sign you and take your book. I signed with Alfred Knopf—they felt like the most prestigious. And then they helped me shape up my notebook into a book.

The first thing you do is drop half of it, and stick with the more worthy half. And then you start thinking, "What's the line running through this? Is it an autobiography?" Yeah. "Is it a travelogue?" Not really. "Is there more writing to be done to shape it like an autobiography?" Yeah.

I worked with Victoria Wilson at Knopf and she helped me shape it. She would say, "You don't say anything about when you and Paul were working—how did you find your sound? Your records have a distinct sound. How did you get into that?" So she would say things that she felt the reader was going to really want, and that helped me.

I began to realize that there are some themes I'm writing about here. There's straight autobiographical prose, and I open the book that way. There's a definite tension to Simon & Garfunkel, the history of that

group and what happened to those two guys. There's my love life—I'm very lucky to be married to a beautiful woman named Kathryn, and we have two kids—that takes up some of my book. There's me talking about show business, what it feels like to go onstage, and the reality of being a performer. I've been an actor in my time. I go into Mike Nichols, Jack Nicholson.

In the book, you mention that some of your first audiences were synagogue congregations. How did that spiritual setting shape your voice?
My early singing was all about great-sounding rooms, acoustics. In my neighborhood, there was a synagogue that had a high ceiling and wooden walls—and the reverb was wonderful. And that got me into singing. The early melodies I sang were ancient, minor-key Jewish melodies. And that minor key raised a lot of goosebumps on my arms at a very young age, and I could see it moved audiences. They'd tear up. Notice that I'm speaking with musical answers, rather than religious answers. Spiritually, I do the best I can to try and be a feeling human being who is humble and knows that there are larger forces on Earth. You can call it God. You can call it whatever you want. I call it "larger forces on Earth, that make us humble, that make us dumbstruck with the wonder of this planet." Yes, I do the best I can to commune with these larger forces. And I sing with that kind of connection, and I hope to touch people's spirituality.

You've started performing regularly again after battling vocal problems. Have you enjoyed returning to the road and focusing on more intimate listening rooms?
Well, now that the voice has come back after having lost it in 2010, I'm just so grateful and thrilled. It's so much fun to use it and to hear the sound of Artie Garfunkel in good form. I heard Simon & Garfunkel before anybody else heard them. I made them. It happened through me and the speaker, years ago. So the delight of making a delightful sound is mine first—I'm thrilled to do it. I don't know when I've had this much fun. It seems that as we get older, we yearn more and more for the thrill of what we do. Maybe it's mortality. It sits on your shoulders and it says, "If not now, when? If you're not going to control guns in America, when will you? If you're not going to sing and get it on, when will you?"

It's new for me to play a place like City Winery, where the audience is seated. There are dinner tables—I never used to do this. And they're so close, they touch the tips of your shoes onstage. I feared those experiences all my life, until recently. I said, "Let's try it." And it's a lot about the audience's sensitivity. I thought, "If they will hush up and you can work with the quiet attention and stillness that you need, Mr. Garfunkel, then it might work at City Winery." And it did. I come out with my cerebral, serious attitude. And I changed the awareness of the room from pop star to serious singer. And they all hush up. And even the waitresses are very accommodating.

There's a Randy Newman song, "Real Emotional Girl"—"She's a real emotional girl, she wears her heart on her sleeve." I would've never played a song with such an empty arrangement in the past, only working with Dave Mackay on piano. To me, that Randy Newman song is theatrical. I love working the left side of the stage and the right side of the stage, moving around, showing them my kisser and trying to break their hearts with the poignancy of Randy Newman's brilliant writing. It's part of this new, less-is-more approach. I sometimes open the show with "April Come She Will." It's short and sweet. April, May, June, July—it's a relationship that lives and flowers and fades and dies. Call it Simon & Garfunkel; it's many love affairs. Simplicity shines when the arrangement is so empty.

You mentioned the cycles of friendship. How would you describe your relationship with Paul Simon at this point?
Oh, the autumn—it's not a good time. It's always tough to analyze a relationship in public. It's essentially very embarrassing. Where is it now? I don't know. Go to Paul—ask him.

***What Is It All but Luminous* is packed with lists, including some of the songs that inspired you as a singer and, later, as an arranger.**
These are the songs that changed my life—that's slightly different from favorites. So "changed my life" means going back autobiographically, and remembering which tunes really affected you. The Crew Cuts had a hit with [The Chords'] "Sh-boom" when I was young and that really affected me. The lead singer was up front, and the background guys were going "Life could be a dream..." Then, the the lead guy goes, "Life could be a dream." And I heard the combination of lead and background, and it charmed me. There weren't many records when I was a kid with that. And then along came R&B. Now you have the lead singer up front and you have the rest of the group doing doo-wop. And that's another way to put the front guy ahead of the background music. I guess I was starting to see things as an arranger would in those early days.

The '60s in America—we really broke out in that period. Imagine hearing "Good Vibrations," Brian Wilson's masterpiece, for the first time, after Perry Como and Patti Page, and all those pop songs that were in that predictable category. The use of the recording studio as if it were Vincent van Gogh's palette—it was great and exciting and fun to see what records could be. They don't capture the '60s in any treatment. When they try to give people that don't know a sense of what it was like, I never think they capture the thrill.

Did you feel this cultural shift as it was happening?
The Monterey Pop Festival is very important with respect to what we're talking about. That really was the pulse of the shift—right there in '67. It was in its absolute authentic truth—this breakout of American spirit. Years ago, I saw D.A. Pennebaker's film treatment of Monterey Pop and I thought, "Almost! They almost got it!" But the film doesn't quite get you there—to see Jefferson Airplane onstage thrilling the crowd with their backs to the audience, looking at their own light show on the back wall. Once upon a time, that was a whole new thing—to put your back to the audience and play to the screen with these weird jellylike amorphous movements that made an art piece on the back wall of your stage. It was cool! It sounds like a little thing now, but it was once a first.

I stood next to Jimi Hendrix before he went on. And he was throwing pills down his mouth—I guess it was LSD. And then he went on and did a show that was so wildly creative—making love to his guitar and burning his guitar. But his feline, catlike motions were the greatest of all performers. There's Michael Jackson—he was great. Mick Jagger, in his youth, he moved great. But Jimi Hendrix—it was amazing to be with him just before he went on at Monterey.

In those days, we loved Buffalo Springfield. I was a Mamas and the Papas fan—they were a great American band. Paul and I looked at The Beatles when it came to who's to our left and to our right, trying to make very arty albums. We made up the Monterey Pop Festival—Lou Adler and The Mamas and the Papas and Paul and I. We made up the guest list. We knew it'd be very exciting for Otis Redding to close one of the nights. That was a big high point of the weekend.

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CRYSTAL GARDEN

Boyd Tinsley used Dave Matthews Band's year off to help grow his new project, grassroots style—and now he's hoping to capture that club-baked energy in the studio.

By **ROB SLATER**

ON JAN. 25, 2016, Dave Matthews Band dropped their annual cross-country summer tour dates. But their announcement came with an important caveat: 2017 would be their first year completely off the road since they formed 25 years earlier.

There were several reasons for the break: The band members were eager to spend time with their families, take a breather from their usual grueling tour schedule and pursue a variety of other musical endeavors. For violinist Boyd Tinsley, that project is the rising Seattle-based Crystal Garden, which he took under his wing in 2015. He threw all his weight behind the rock outfit, sitting at the helm for their 2017 debut, *Let the Rocks Cry Out*, adding his trademark fiddle to the set of songs and recruiting DMB collaborator Stanley Jordan to appear on the LP. He also spent a good portion of the year on the road with the group, packing into small clubs and even throwing the occasional pop-up show.

Behind his patented dark sunglasses, Tinsley still finds comfort in the embrace of a song. The outfit now finds itself on the precipice of another album and more live dates. (Tinsley says to expect a harder edge from the group.) "It's a whole different part of my brain that's working," Tinsley says. "And once again, as a producer, a lot of things that I do in the studio are things that I learned from Dave Matthews Band. It's what I've learned from other producers who've worked with us, and what I've learned from my playing and observations."

Follow the Leader

What I have to offer [Crystal Garden] is 30 years playing music professionally—even before DMB. There's a lot of stuff, just from my experiences, that I can teach them and show them. But the incredible thing about these guys is that they follow my direction absolutely flawlessly. When I ask them to do something, they completely get it, and they do it. They're very pliable. They trust me, and they allow me to mold them as a band.

They can do just about anything, musically. They're really studied musicians; they're just so knowledgeable. The younger guys, Charlie Csontos and Matt Frewen, go back and study music from other decades. They're like 25 and 27, and they study stuff from the '60s, '70s, '80s and '90s. You always hear them listening to all of these different periods of rock music, and they fuse those eras together. They just soak all of that up, and have such a wealth of rock knowledge. One of the things that impresses me is these guys' ability to go from genre to genre of rock, play all of it confidently and be familiar with it. Their songs have a lot of diversity because they can go into different directions.

Learning Yourself

As far as playing with them, it's like when you play with musicians that are better than, or of the same caliber as you. It brings stuff out of you. It's a different band than DMB, but it's also a group that's very talented. You just play different things and you learn. There are things that I've learned from playing with them—and I'm sure this is the case with Stefan [Lessard] and Carter [Beauford] and Jeff [Coffin], who also play with other people on breaks. You learn by being exposed to different people and different music. Then you come back to DMB, and you have all of this new music inside of you to bring to the band. That was one of the things that I got from them—being able to play and listen to music that was different from what I've played before, and to learn from that.

I'm looking at everything as a producer. You're looking at the big picture and you're also listening for those things that are going to make a good song. I love that aspect about it—finding the nuggets of gold that present themselves and then putting it all together. It's just fun.

The Lillywhite Way

[Longtime DMB collaborator] Steve Lillywhite was a big influence on how I look at producing music. Steve's thing was that he knew how to get the best out of people. He knows how to get the best out of you, and he knows how to put it together.

On those first [DMB] records—particularly on [*Under the Table and Dreaming* and *Crash*], but even on *Before These Crowded Streets*, to a degree—there would be days where Steve and the engineer would be working on the stuff that we'd recorded, and sometimes, I would just stop by and listen. Steve really didn't like people in the studio when he was editing; he just wanted it to be him and the engineer. I would come in and I wouldn't say a word, and I'd put myself in a place where I wouldn't be in the way. And because of that, Steve would let me stay.

I'd listen to how Steve was putting together the songs. And just seeing the whole process that those two guys would go through, I was just learning—almost like in a classroom—from Steve about how to go about producing a record. There would be times that he would turn around, look at me, point something out and be like, "Check this out right here." He's been a great role model and mentor.

Getting the Band Back Together

We're going to do the [next DMB] album. As far as the timing of it, that hasn't been worked out right now. But there's been some work going on between the musicians in the band so, in a sense, we've already begun the process. Sometime [in 2018], we'll head to the studio and get that next DMB record out.

It's going to be a lot of fun. It's probably going to be a record that will be directed more by the musicians initially, like our first three albums we did with Lillywhite. All of those songs, or at least most of them, we had played onstage—they were songs that we had already crafted before we went into the studio. I think that's what the process that's evolving now will look like. We'll craft some of these songs together as band before we actually go into the studio. When the musicians start the songs, arrange the songs and, of course, write the songs, I think it brings out the truest form of Dave Matthews Band.

GROUND SCORE

The continuing adventures of *Relix*'s beer project with Kyle Hollingsworth and SweetWater Brewery

By **DEAN BUDNICK**

In our past two issues, I shared the story of the Relix *partnership with String Cheese Incident keyboardist Kyle Hollingsworth and SweetWater Brewery. In September, we traveled to Crosby Hop Farm in Woodburn, Ore., to select the hops that we would use for our collaborative beer. Then, in early November, Kyle and I flew to Atlanta where we brewed the pilot batch of our IPA. A few weeks later, it was finally time for a taste.*

THE COUNTDOWN IS underway.

By the time you read this, we'll be just a few days away from sharing our collaborative creation with all of you.

I've heard it said that it's all about the journey and not the destination. I think there's something to that—feel free to insert your own Steve Perry joke here—although, in this case, the destination will be hop-forward and quaffable (aka delicious).

Back in November, we brewed the pilot batch at the splendid SweetWater Brewery. From there, we yielded the floor to chemistry, awaiting completion of the fermentation process.

Finally, in early December, it was time for a taste, at which point SweetWater head brewer Nick Nock filed this report from the SweetWater lab.

BREWERS LOG 12/14/17

Several brewers and I sat down and sampled the "Ground Score" to get a cumulative description. It was not a problem due to the fact that everyone wants to drink the beer. We ran out of chairs.

This is what we came up with:

The color is of a sunset right before the flash.

[It tasted like] tropical melon, most likely papaya, with lemon and lime integrating with orange pith, as well as fresh orange blossom honey.

To add to that, there were piney, young spring onion, fresh honeydew, kiwi and mango flavors.

Everyone had to come back for a second "sample," and one of the quotes was: "It definitely has you wanting to come back for more," even though it is 7.1 percent ABV.

Well, that sounds lovely, no?

When I caught up with Kyle for his opinion, he was in middle of rehearsals with The String Cheese Incident for the group's New Year's Eve run.

Here's his take:

Very drinkable! It feels like a great winter IPA, although I'll drink an IPA any time!

I think it will be well received.

I'll concur with both of them (although my beer lexicon and range of descriptors is not on the level of the SweetWater sampling squad).

As for my own experience, first off, let me say that I'm cuckoo for crowlers. Any day that a courier service drops off a package of said receptacles filled with fermentables is a glorious day by me.

If you're not aware of what a crowler is—OK, I wasn't either—it's a 32-ounce, machine-sealed, aluminum can. It's a travel-friendly alternative to the glass growler that you can find at your local craft brewery.

When my crowlers arrived from SweetWater, I decided to treat them with the respect they merited. First, I pulled out the tasting glasses I brought home from our visit to Crosby Hop Farm. Then, I decided to serve things up Rhode Island style, on my classic Dr. Seuss "Gangway for Gansett" tray. Here's a fun fact of which you may not be aware: Back in the 1940s, fellow New Englander Theodor Seuss Geisel created

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some advertising illustrations for Narragansett Beer. I have one of the beer trays that the brewery produced featuring Geisel's Chief Gansett, who is standing atop a small wagon, delivering a frothy beverage alongside a scampering feline, who announces, "Too Good To Miss!" The tray hangs on the wall of my kitchen, where it serves a decorative function, but it also assumes a utilitarian role on special occasions such as this.

While my initial sips were pure bliss, the real test awaited that afternoon when I could pour the new brew for my craft beer *consigliere*, Josh Letourneau. Earlier this summer, before I flew across the country to Crosby Hop Farm, I spent some time with Josh at Grey Sail Brewing, where Captain's Daughter—the double IPA he created while serving as brewmaster—remains a personal favorite. However, by the time the pilot batch arrived, Josh had moved on from Grey Sail after six years. In early December, Josh and his partner Chip Sampson, opened Shaidzon Beer Co. in West Kingston, R.I. I brought one of my crowlers down to Shaidzon so that we could share samples all around.

The results? Winner winner, chicken dinner (actually cheesesteaks at Tilly's—whenever you find yourself in the Ocean State, I actively encourage you to visit Shaidzon and then amble over to Tilly's).

But back to our beer...

If you're an IPA enthusiast, then I am altogether confident that our brew is for you. (And even if don't think you're a hoppy camper, give it a taste. I have faith that it'll win you over.)

With Kyle Hollingsworth on the case, I think we can deliver your key to hoppiness.

OK, enough hop puns.

Frankly, I've seen my fair share at this point. In mid-November, *Relix*, Kyle and SweetWater put out a general call via our Facebook pages, encouraging folks to help us name our new liquid refreshment. Many of the options were quite entertaining and, while the official sobriquet is neither "Wook Juice" nor "My Mouth Moves When I Play the Keys IPA," both of those work for me.

Still, without further ado, the name of our collaborative creation is, Ground Score. This moniker seems altogether fitting, given our experience at Crosby watching the hop plants emerge from the soil. It also captures the spirit of that sweet bonus bonanza you happen upon while making the rounds at your favorite festival (SweetWater 420 Fest, for instance).

You probably already figured out the name, since "Ground Score" is the title of the piece (and Nick mentions it in his report). If you look above on this very page, then you can also get a feel for the label art, which as of this moment, is still a work in progress.

What is *not* a work in progress, however, is the beer itself. By this point, it's made its way to the SweetWater Dank Tank, where it'll be shipped up to New York for our kickoff party with the Kyle Hollingsworth Band at Brooklyn Bowl on February 7.

If you can't make it, then don't fret. You'll be able to find the beer on draft and in 4-packs of 16-ounce cans anywhere within the 21 states that carry SweetWater, from Miami to Manhattan, Chicago to Corpus Christi.

So head out there for your own Ground Score.

"Any time you know that your art is going to be exposed to a larger group of people it influences what you're creating . I think The Beatles had that, on a much more macro scale," Lukas Nelson says of Promise of the Real's major-label debut.

Myriam Santos

SOONER OR LATER, IT ALL GETS REAL

Lukas Nelson was born into country royalty but quickly struck out on his own rock-and-roll quest—and grew into the missing link between Neil Young and Lady Gaga in the process. *By* **JEFF TAMARKIN**

WILLIE NELSON and his wife gave their two boys three valuable pieces of advice when they were young. "Number one," Willie recalls, "was don't be an asshole. Number two: Don't be an asshole." And number three? "*Don't* be a goddamn *asshole*!"

"That's true," chuckles Lukas Nelson, one of the recipients of that pointed parental guidance. "I learned not to be an asshole. It's a great lesson and it's given me quite a lot of joy in my life and in love. But I also learned the value of hard work from my dad, just from watching him. And I learned how to treat people. Dad leads by example; he's humble."

"I've always believed in treating people with respect and treating people the way you want to be treated. It seems to work," confirms Willie.

What also worked was letting the two boys—whose mother, Annie D'Angelo, Willie's fourth wife, has been married to him since 1991—find their own way in life. The couple neither encouraged nor discouraged Lukas, who turned 29 on Christmas Day and fronts Promise of the Real, or his 27-year-old brother, Micah, from following in their father's footsteps.

"Ever since they were born, there's been musical instruments around them where they grew up," says Willie. "There's a cabin at our place with a piano and five or six guitars. So it was just a natural thing. I didn't try to push it on them. I kind of let 'em hear me play, and hear my sister Bobbie [Nelson, Willie's longtime pianist and elder sibling], and the next thing you know, I see Micah over on the drums and Luke's playing the guitar. And then the *next* thing you know, they're playing good!"

So good, in fact, that both Lukas and Micah—the youngest of Willie's seven offspring—are now prolific and highly creative artists in their own right. Last summer, Lukas Nelson & Promise of the Real released their major label debut—easily their most impressive album to date—and they've served as Neil Young's chosen backup band since they met at Farm Aid in 2014, touring with him extensively and collaborating on three albums (2015's *The Monsanto Years*, 2016's live *Earth* and the recently released *The Visitor*). Micah also serves as an auxiliary member of Promise of the Real when they support Young and leads Pårticle Kid, a project he describes on his Facebook page as "Folk-a-delic Forest-Funk Space-Punk Avant-Pop Psych-Rock Dope-Scapes."

In addition, Lukas and Micah teamed with their dad to record this past fall's *Willie and the Boys: Willie's Stash Vol. 2*, which finds the trio putting their own harmonic stamp on country classics, mostly by Hank Williams.

POTR, as Lukas' band is often called, is coming up on its 10th anniversary this year. The lineup currently includes Nelson on guitar and lead vocals, Tato Melgar (percussion), Corey McCormick (bass, vocals), Jesse Siebenberg (steel guitars, Farfisa organ, vocals), Alberto Bof (piano, Wurlitzer, B3 organ) and Anthony LoGerfo (drums). The self-titled *Lukas Nelson & Promise of the Real* (Fantasy Records), produced by John Alagia (John Mayer, Dave Matthews Band), features a dozen songs composed by Lukas (he co-wrote "High Times" with Alyssa Miller), and follows *Promise of the Real* (2010), *Wasted* (2012), *Live Endings* (2012), 2016's *Something Real* and a handful of EPs. Two of the tunes on the new release are remakes of songs that appeared on the last album, another dates back to their debut and one is a longtime live staple.

As far as Nelson is concerned though, *Lukas Nelson & Promise of the Real* is, in many ways, the band's first truly representative release—its music honed by an annual touring schedule of more than 200 shows and countless hours spent writing and recording. "The production is the key," he says of the album. "The quality of the studio, the quality of the production, the decisions that John Alagia and the band made in the studio—that all led to a higher quality sound. It sounds more cinematic; it's got more of a weight to it. And we're a better band than when we recorded those other albums."

* * *

CUT OVER A TWO-YEAR STRETCH at the Village Studios in Los Angeles, with additional recording done at Pedernales Studios in Texas and Atomic Sound in Brooklyn, *Lukas Nelson & Promise of the Real* exemplifies a palpable maturation of Nelson as a composer, musician, vocalist and bandleader. Nelson says that the time spent on the road playing in supersized venues with Young—including the October 2016 Desert Trip concerts in Indio, Calif., where they shared a bill with Paul McCartney—upped POTR's game.

"Any time you know that your art is going to be exposed to a larger group of people it influences what you're creating," Nelson says. "I think The Beatles had that, on a much more macro scale. They knew that many were listening, so they got inspiration from the anticipation of people waiting to hear what they'd put out next. A true creative type will take that anticipation, channel it and find some relatable stuff—stuff that speaks to a larger group of people."

> "I think they've got what they need. They have confidence, talent, and a love for the music and a love for the fans."
>
> WILLIE NELSON

Nelson credits Alagia (who also contributes keyboards throughout the album) with helping him realize the diversity and the more expansive sound of the album: "He's got a lot of great ideas, in terms of arrangements and chord structures. He's a good songwriter himself. He's got a great voice. The songs that he writes have a great sense of melody. We didn't change the songs all that much. What John gave us was a level of comfort to be who we are in the studio. He had a lot of great ideas that we put into practice."

Young also provided useful input. "We have a crazy cosmic connection with Neil," Nelson says. "We speak each other's language and we learn so much from him. I'm in awe of his attention to detail, focus and work ethic. He helped me on this album with the song 'Forget About Georgia,' just a couple of refrains. He'd say, 'You should sing that part again because that's a great hook.' He loved the part where I'm talking about Ray Charles. At the end of the first solo, I was going back into [the line] 'Just forget about Georgia,' and he said, 'No, you should go back to Ray at that point.' So I put that in there. And he had some production ideas."

The "Ray" line that Nelson is referring to arrives midway into the plaintive eight-minute-plus country-blues-tinged ballad. Following his delivery of the verse, Nelson's longing vocal gives way to an audacious and affecting guitar solo, a perfect paradigm for his straightforward, fat-free playing style. The song is one of the two remakes from *Something Real,* which was released on Marco Benevento's Royal Potato Family records, and is an undeniable highlight on an album filled with potential hits. "Set Me Down on a Cloud" is the 2016 set's other redo, and the story behind it is simply heartbreaking.

"I was playing in Ashland, Ore., and there's a place called Jackson Wellsprings, which is a hot spring where they have gatherings," Nelson says. "We were staying there and, after the first night, I woke up to a letter at the door of the bus—a long, beautifully written letter that told us about how this lady and her husband had been at the show the night before. She said it was the first time she'd been able to feel any positive feeling at all since she'd accidentally run over and killed her 4-year-old daughter. She asked me in the letter to please write a song about it, so I wrote 'Set Me Down on a Cloud' but it takes on new meanings as it goes out."

Another standout is "Just Outside of Austin," which Nelson says was inspired by his love of the songs of the late country singer Roger Miller. Willie sits in on the uptempo, mostly acoustic number, playing his legendary "Trigger" guitar, and Bobbie Nelson adds piano. Micah Nelson also guests on the album, playing piano and banjo on "Runnin' Shine," while Jess Wolfe and Holly Laessig of Lucius stamp five of the album's tunes with their superb vocals.

But perhaps the most eye-opening guest credit belongs to

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CHASING THE ETERNAL SUNRISE

The three intrepid alchemists of Khruangbin (that's "kroong-bin") travel south of the border and east of the Nile on *Con Todo El Mundo*—their second album of mostly instrumental grooves rooted in styles as far-flung as '70s soul, surf-rock, Turkish psych, Persian jazz and plenty more.

By **BILL MURPHY**

Drop a needle on Khruangbin's latest album—and really, you *should* drop a needle on it because this music is meant for spinning on vinyl—and you'll see visions. They might manifest as the shimmering waves of heat on a desert horizon, or the bustling traffic at a downtown Bangkok roundabout or even the flickering screen of a grindhouse cinema double feature. Whatever your take, Khruangbin embraces it; after all, as co-founder and lead guitarist Mark Speer suggests, he and his bandmates are still mapping out the mission themselves.

"When we first started the band, we wanted to have a formula," he says. "It's like, 'This is what we do, and we're not gonna try and go outside the box too much. We're gonna explore the box we're in. I've always been a big fan of that. I used to be in bands where it was like, 'Man, we've gotta think outside the box!' And all I'm thinking is: 'You guys don't even know.' Music should never be just for the sake of being experimental. Before you even start, you have to know what you're experimenting with first."

As origin stories go, Khruangbin's is quirky to say the least. Start with the name: It's actually Thai for "airplane" (literally, "engine fly"), signifying the group's love of vintage Thai soul and funk music, as well as the jet-setting range of influences that have provided a limitless source of inspiration for their liquified, hypnotic sound. Speer first met drummer Donald "DJ" Johnson at St. John's United Methodist Church in Houston—well-known as the house of worship where Beyoncé grew up singing. At the time, Johnson was playing organ; he and Speer performed together at St. John's for nearly a decade before it occurred to them that they might want to start a band of their own.

"We would hang out every Tuesday after rehearsal at a pub called Rudyard's," Speer recalls. "We'd have Mexican Cokes and eat burgers and just talk about music. Then I met Laura Lee through a mutual friend, and she started meeting us there too. So we all hung out and ate food and talked about music before we ever played a note. As it turned out, me and Laura started Khruangbin with the intent of exploring these other types of music that we'd been listening to, especially Thai funk."

Back then, the internet was quickly morphing into a wide-open playground for a devoted crate digger like Speer, who was constantly on the lookout for a new musical fix. He found it in blogs like Awesome Tapes from Africa, and specifically in Monrakplengthai ("I love

"I grew up with people from all walks of life, from all over the world," Mark Speer says. "I didn't know that wasn't the norm."

Mary Kang

Thai music"), launched by Thai music enthusiast Peter Doolan in 2008.

It didn't take long for Laura Lee to catch on. While still a college student in Houston, she began teaching herself to play bass by night. "I went through a fit of insomnia in 2010 where I just couldn't sleep," she says. "I've always been somebody who'd rather make the most of it than just lay there, so I basically started playing at night—which turned out to be great because then I could really focus with no distractions."

Starting with the Jamaican dub records recommended by Speer and looking to Roots Radics bassist Errol "Flabba" Holt for inspiration, Lee perfected a loping, behind-the-beat feel that served her well when she and Speer first decamped to a barn on the Speer family's property in rural Burton, Texas, now reverently known as The Farm. Khruangbin's early demos, built around Speer's looped breakbeats, drew heavily from the Thai funk and soul ethos they'd absorbed with such fervor. When Speer and Lee realized they needed a drummer, Johnson stepped up to complete the trio.

"Honestly, what makes us special is that we all have extremely different backgrounds," Johnson says. "I grew up playing in church, and around my teens I started getting into hip-hop and R&B. I started out playing keys and then some bass before I got to drums. It wasn't until Khruangbin that I really picked up the drums again. But a lot of the stuff that Mark and Laura are introducing me to, that music is new to me every day. In fact there's not a lot that Mark *doesn't* know, so when I play something for him that he hasn't heard, I'm jumping up and down!"

* * *

CON TODO EL MUNDO ("WITH All the World") picks up directly where the band's 2015 debut *The Universe Smiles Upon You* left off, at least in terms of sonic texture. Lee has described The Farm as the band's "spiritual home," and with good reason: Not only do the corrugated surfaces and open spaces of the barn where the band records provide a natural reverb that makes everything sound as though it was tracked in Studio One in Jamaica circa 1975 (with significant thanks to the recording savvy of engineer Steve Christensen), but the location itself also proved to be pivotal when it came to writing new material for the album.

"We needed some crunch writing time in the way that Mark and I used to write," Lee explains. During the writing phase of *The Universe Smiles Upon You*, Lee had been living in London, which necessitated sending tracks back and forth online. "Mark would send me a drum loop, and I'd send him a bass line. He'd write guitar over it, and then we'd edit each other. [For the new record] we thought we could just go to the barn and play, and something would evolve. But it didn't quite work out that way."

Khruangbin's three pilots: Donald Johnson, Laura Lee, Mark Speer (l-r)

Speer and Lee sent DJ and their engineer back to Houston and hunkered down at The Farm, each in their own room, to trade ideas at a distance, the way they had before. "We just went back to our original process," she says. "The first morning, it took us maybe an hour and a half to write 'Maria También.' We sent it to DJ, and he was like, 'Oh, yeah—this is clearly what needed to happen.'"

"Maria También" set the tone for the sessions, and wound up being the first single from the album. From Speer's perspective, it emerged from the band's focused listening to "an awful lot of Iranian, Turkish and Spanish music." Of course, given the song's decidedly surf-driven swing, there were other influences at play that Speer simply couldn't resist.

"I wanted to make Khruangbin's 'Apache,'" he says, referring to the '60s instrumental classic that became a surf anthem at the hands of Link Wray, Dick Dale, the Ventures and many more. "I was going for that because the guitar part in 'Apache' is so iconic but, to be honest, my experience with Dick Dale is extremely limited. I know him from 'Misirlou,' which is an old Middle Eastern song. I was listening to this Turkish psych group from the '70s, and they were playing a similar pattern on the [lute-like] saz. I thought it was awesome, so I went for that feeling on 'Maria También.'"

When the band, and Lee in particular, expanded the scope of the song's musical roots into the making of the video, the narrative took on another life. With the help of creative director Sanam Petri, the idea was to piece together archival clips from Iranian TV that showed various songwriters, singers, dancers and artists—all of them women—at the height of their popularity, before the country's 1979 revolution nearly erased them from history. It's a poignant, and political, reminder of the creative power of women, especially in the context of recent events.

"Obviously, there's something to that," Lee says, "but I think, more than anything, it's just historical. We're just showing these people in a way that isn't what you see on TV—in a way that's actually more familiar to something we know. It's presenting a part of the world in its color and its freedom of expression, and then also showing how that was taken away. It is political because of what happened in Iran, but it's more just telling a story, which gets lost sometimes."

If there's a unifying storyline behind *Con Todo El Mundo*, then it's more autobiographical. "Lady and Man" comes across as a travelogue of the band's newfound influences, with call-and-response guitar parts and harmonies that sound distinctly Mediterranean. "Evan Finds the Third Room" is a discofied ode to their tour manager who sorted out a hotel booking while the musicians were feeling particularly delirious on the road. "Friday Morning," one of the few songs with discernible vocals, pieces together tunes that Speer wrote in church—a cosmic, soulful and tempo-changing vamp that encapsulates how symbiotic the band has become as a unit.

> "Honestly, what makes us special is that we all have extremely different backgrounds."
> **DONALD JOHNSON**

The album title, as well as the two songs "Cómo Me Quieres" and "Cómo Te Quiero," were meant as a tribute to Lee's Mexican-American grandfather. "I'd been thinking about him a lot," she says. "He used to ask me as a little girl, '*Cómo me quieres*?' which is 'How much do you love me?' I'd come up with different answers like, 'Oh, a little bit, grandpa,' and he wouldn't stop asking me until I said, '*Con todo el mundo*,' which is 'with all the world.' So that's for him, but it also means something more, because we're influenced by the world too."

* * *

AS A SUM OF THEIR INFLUENCES, Khruangbin can't be easily categorized, which, in a way, insulates the band from the accusation of "cultural appropriation." If anything, given their individual talents—from Speer's adventurously melodic guitar style to Lee's in-the-pocket bass lines and Johnson's wide-open use of space on the drums (and perhaps more important, his ever-steady, loop-like precision, which hews close to a hip-hop mode of beatmaking)—it's clear that their musical horizons are still expanding. In a fraught time when nationalist and isolationist tendencies around the world are goading the most susceptible among us to give in to our basest fears, Khruangbin's espousal of universality comes across almost as a throwback, but a refreshingly positive one. Sometimes in looking to the past, the way ahead suddenly becomes that much clearer.

"People are always asking how we feel about the president, or the direction the country is headed in," Lee observes, citing the band's frequent touring overseas, "but we want to just promote unity and a boundary-less world. That's the thing to stand behind right now. To me, that's the better message, and if our music does instill feelings of peace for some people, or give them calm from something, then that's incredible."

Of course, the diverse musical legacy of Texas—with its wide range of styles and sounds—is another guiding force. And in an ideal world, as the three restless souls in Khruangbin see it, that's the mindset that will bring people closer together.

"I grew up with people from all walks of life, from all over the world," Speer reflects. "I didn't know that wasn't the norm. And the makeup of Khruangbin is just totally Houston. It's in the music we play and the way we mix it all together. Oddly enough, just us having an integrated band could be seen as a political statement, but I don't really get into that. I'm staying away from Facebook because everyone is looking for something to nitpick about. Shouldn't we all be trying to figure out a way to work together? That's why the music is so important. I mean, you can hear it in the Thai music we liked, which was heavily influenced by American funk and soul, and then reflected back onto us. It goes back and forth. It becomes like a mirror against a mirror, and I really like that concept. This is a tiny little rock we live on."

Mary Kang

"It took us a long time to figure out how to play that song with instruments so we ended up doing it karaoke [style]," Goldwasser says of their signature number, "Kids." "It wasn't a 'fuck you,' it just didn't sound like a band song."

JUST KIDS

After an extended break that some interpreted as a possible breakup, MGMT have reclaimed their 'oracular spectacular' sound *By* **MIKE GREENHAUS**

ANDREW VANWYNGARDEN was driving through Western New York when the reality of a Donald J. Trump presidency slowly came into focus. It was the night before the singer/guitarist and his MGMT partner, keyboardist Ben Goldwasser, were slated to start a session with their longtime producer Dave Fridmann and the returns had started to roll in. Hillary Clinton's chances of winning looked bleak, to say the least. MGMT have never been the most outwardly political band, but VanWyngarden knew that a new dark age was upon him.

"We like to leave it up to the listener to interpret our songs, but we wrote and recorded this album in 2016 so certain things crept into the music," he says just over a year after that surreal November evening, while preparing to roll out MGMT's first full-length album since 2013, *Little Dark Age*. "Our emotions and moods changed with the news of the country."

It's a mild autumn afternoon and VanWyngarden and Goldwasser are sitting on the same side of a wooden booth in a low-key Brooklyn pub. Though the tongue-in-cheek lyrics of their kaleidoscopic anthem "Time to Pretend" have served as the Brooklyn music scene's unofficial mission statement for the better part of a decade, besides a festival set a few months earlier, it has been almost four years since MGMT have played a proper New York concert—and before this spring, they had spent over two years almost entirely off the grid. Especially in the age of instant social-media access, that break felt particularly worrisome, though MGMT never announced any sort of official hiatus and usually wait a few years between records.

MGMT are currently congregated in the area for a pair of all-star shows celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Velvet Underground's first L.P. VanWyngarden, who has lived in the Rockaway Beach section of Queens, N.Y. since before Superstorm Sandy ransacked the area in 2012, arrives first, sporting some Movember-approved facial hair; Goldwasser, who was near the forefront of the current pack of Kings County expats decamping to Los Angeles, walks in a few minutes later wearing a black leather jacket that conceals his otherwise visable tatoos. They're both a little fried. The tribute's opening night featured fellow art-rock trailblazers like TV on the Radio's Tunde Adebimpe, Kurt Vile, and Avey Tare and Geologist of Animal Collective, and the after-party turned into something of an early-aughts family reunion. The MGMT duo weren't sure what to expect—and, despite their prankster reputations, were uncharacteristically restrained onstage.

"We had to control ourselves," VanWyngarden says with a smile. "During 'Sister Ray,' I really wanted to say, 'sucking on a ding-dong' over and over as a nod to Suicide."

"Suicide did a cover of 'Sister Ray' and they just kept saying that over and over again," Goldwasser explains, nodding to one of MGMT's earliest post-punk influences, before shifting the focus back to the Velvets' experimental heart-and-soul, John Cale, who used the shows to celebrate his 75th birthday. "It's cool when you hear older musicians doing things that are forward-thinking and creative and not just rehashing."

With a knowing grin, VanWyngarden admits that he first heard the Velvet Underground when Phish started covering "Rock and Roll" in the late-'90s. (He tried to check out one of the Vermont Quartet's Baker's Dozen shows this past summer and couldn't believe how hard it was to nab tickets.) Goldwasser's dad introduced him to the seminal indie-rock group, but he really began getting into their music when he started crate-digging at his local record store and a clerk suggested *White Light/White Heat*.

"The first time I heard it, I had no idea what to make of it, but it infiltrated my brain," Goldwasser says. "I thought, 'This music is so badly recorded' and now, to me, it sounds amazing and perfect. My brain had to realize that there were a lot more possibilities of how things could sound."

Even when their 2007 Columbia debut *Oracular Spectacular* turned them into fashion icons and hipster heartthrobs seemingly overnight, MGMT never truly felt like part of the mainstream. Their songs were the product of a generation programmed to be skeptical of rock-star excess, yet powered by a sense of 21st-century narcissism and self-awareness. "That's something our whole friend group, the guys in the live band, always bonded over," Goldwasser says. "This irreverence for nostalgia. We respect the touchstones of pop culture, but we also don't feel like anything is above being made fun of."

Yet, recently, both VanWyngarden and Goldwasser have been thinking about their community of musicians, who are now indie-rock elder statesmen. Goldwasser loved the way Patti Smith described her small circle of friends in *Just Kids*, and both he and VanWyngarden point to the similarities in the communal settings that birthed both the Grateful Dead and the Velvet Underground. "I love it in the *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* when they pull into New York on the bus like, '*Whaaat*,'" VanWyngarden says before breaking into laughter.

Little Dark Age isn't so much a full-circle return to form as it is a reboot after the longest period of dormancy

in MGMT's career. After two highly experimental albums that scared away some of the fairweather fans drawn to their breakthrough hits—and proved to another subset of their audience that their swirl of indie, electronica and jam could sound pretty 'oracular spectacular'—MGMT have reclaimed some of the hooks and synth-happy energy that ignited their fan base a decade ago. But, instead of simply trying to rewrite their biggest anthems, they've managed to come out the other side of the psych-rock rabbit hole—offering a set of more straightforward, catchy tunes that still feel sinister at a time when hip-hop and radio-pop have overtaken the festival underground.

"Younger people are growing up in a world where that's normal," Goldwasser says. "The level of consumer culture is so high—and I don't necessarily think it's a bad thing. That's the way the world is. But kids are still really smart. They're figuring out ways to cut this stuff up and make their own thing out of it. It sounds more commercial." He pauses and adds, "I'm just realizing those two worlds weren't as far apart as we thought."

"I definitely feel like the older I get and the more time that [passes] between us playing shows or putting out music, the less in touch I feel with what's happening in the world and what people like," VanWyngarden admits. "But that has its benefits, too. When we're in our own bubble making music, we're not overthinking if it's gonna fit into whatever world. I like that."

* * *

WHEN THEY TRULY ARRIVED a decade ago, MGMT were the defining millennial band. Goldwasser and VanWyngarden met as freshman at Middleton, Conn.'s Wesleyan University and officially formed The Management in 2002. Their early gigs were a mix of performance art and college fun—covering the *Ghostbusters* theme for a prolonged period of time and riffing on Talking Heads. Goldwasser, who grew up in a small town in Upstate New York, spent a summer with VanWyngarden in his native Memphis, Tenn., playing with his old high-school band; they had seminal moments as fans at the first two Bonnaroos, where VanWyngarden danced onstage with The Flaming Lips in an animal costume.

The Management started writing original songs and recording music too, including future classics like "Time to Pretend" and "Kids" that brilliantly used a number of then-current touchstones—

> "We're in our thirties and don't care what people think. It's like, 'Fuck it, we'll make synth-pop if we feel like it.'" **BEN GOLDWASSER**

jam-rock, pre-mainstream indie, electronica, noise experiments, post-punk, psych—as both satirical reference points and rallying calls. At the time, their music was relatively direct, but still subversive—masking some pointed cultural criticisms with youthful exuberance and Goldwasser's catchy keyboard parts. After graduation, Goldwasser and VanWyngarden went their separate ways for a while—Goldwasser considered a career in social work and planned to leave the East Coast—but in the most social-media way possible, their music continued to spread virally. Through an A&R intern's recommendation, The Management reached Columbia and, after shortening their name to MGMT, they signed a major label deal.

Mixing new songs with reworked older material, their opus, *Oracular Spectacular,* was an instant success—everyone from Weezer to Phish to Kid Cudi nodded to their music—and set the groundwork for both electro-pop groups like Passion Pit and Foster the People, as well as heady warriors like Tame Impala and Foxygen. But VanWyngarden and Goldwasser pushed back on the pop buzz almost from the beginning. MGMT's live shows felt more in line with a late-night festival set than a SXSW showcase, and they turned heads with their 13-plus minute experimental non-album single, "Metanoia." *Oracular Spectacular*'s proper follow-up, 2010's *Congratulations,* was a prog-rock jab at the mainstream music industry, full of unique time changes and featuring lyrics like, "But I've got someone to make reports/ That tell me how my money's spent/ To book my stays and draw my blinds/ So I can't tell what's really there/ And all I need's a great big congratulations." Though "Flash Delirium" and "Congratulations" were meticulous and still pretty catchy, and the 12-minute "Siberian Breaks" was eye-opening, they alienated the party crowd who still play *Oracular Spectacular*'s songs at sports bars. 2013's *MGMT* was even more dense and acid-rock indebted—a true sonic journey that VanWyngarden and Goldwasser culled from improvisational experiments with Fridmann. The group's newfound fame had strained Goldwasser and VanWyngarden's friendship, and the duo used the *MGMT* sessions to reconnect as pals.

"It's funny, I remember we talked about how we really wanted to write simple pop songs going into that session after *Congratulations*," Goldwasser says. "And that's totally not what happened."

Live, the group mixed high-profile headlining appearances with more off-the-wall installations at the Guggenheim Museum and alongside the Joshua Light Show. MGMT continued to draw big crowds, building up to a December 2013 arena show at Brooklyn's Barclays Center that featured cameos from 1960s cult hero Faine Jade and Butthole Surfers' Gibby Haynes, as well as their new Krautrock version of "Kids." They supported their self-titled LP through late 2014 and, then, quietly disappeared.

"We took a little bit of time after we finished touring," Goldwasser says. "I moved to LA two weeks later—I had things in boxes and just drove out across the country—and we both took some time to be domestic and have normal lives for a little while. And then we started trying to figure out how to do the bicoastal recording thing, which was new for us."

VanWyngarden, who had recently broken up with his model girlfriend, hunkered down at home. He DJ'd on occasion and became increasingly involved in his Rockaway community. "I finished my house and set up a nice stereo system and listened to a lot of vinyl," he says. "I've been rediscovering all sorts of music instead of looking for new music."

Goldwasser adds, "We got a puppy a couple of years ago and ended up hanging out at home with the dog most of the time. It's *so much* work to leave the house. It's a dumb excuse but we just stayed home a lot."

Eventually, the duo decided to test the songwriting waters and regrouped at the end of 2015. VanWyngarden went out to Goldwasser's LA studio a few times and Goldwasser came back East to lay down some tracks at VanWyngarden's attic recording space. At first, they had a little trouble getting into a proper flow, but things settled into a groove after Chairlift's Patrick Wimberly signed on.

"I was engineering all of the sessions and it was a left-brain, right-brain thing—it was hard to take my mind off the screen and be creative," Goldwasser says. "Having someone else in there who could do more of the technical stuff was really helpful. And Patrick has a really good critical, creative brain, too. So it was nice to have someone else in the room that could be like, 'Oh, you guys should work on that more' and, 'That was a cool thing you just did,' so the two of us didn't pass on a good idea."

With Wimberly's help, VanWyngarden and Goldwasser ended up with about 40 song ideas and a few complete compositions before

they decamped to Fridmann's studio in 2016. A sonic wiz best known for his collaborations with The Flaming Lips, Fridmann helped tighten and mold *Oracular Spectacular* and also worked with the band on both *Congratulations* and *MGMT*. For *Little Dark Age*, he pushed VanWyngarden and Goldwasser to hone both their songs and the album's overall sound. "He has a new console in his studio. Whereas before he would go for distortion on a whole mix, this time we left a lot more room in the mix and everything's not maxed out all the time," VanWyngarden says. "And that helped achieve something that's less abrasive."

Goldwasser says that they had hoped to link up with Fridmann much earlier, but everything kept getting pushed back. "Finally, we were like, 'Alright, we have a few songs; we have to get in and see what happens,'" he says. "It was a good moment to realize that we were further along in the process than we thought—it gave us an idea of how the finished record would sound and what would sound weird going forward. It really came together at the last minute, which is not uncommon for us. We'll work on something for a long time at like a snail's pace, and then, at some point, we'll have an epiphany—or we'll set a deadline for ourselves like, 'We really just need to finish this thing.'"

VanWyngarden can't pinpoint exactly what caused the delay, but notes that it is "just the nature of being on a major label—it takes nine months before they'll put an album out after we deliver it."

They worked on the loop at the core of the album's first single, "Little Dark Age" in New York, with VanWyngarden providing the track's infectious bass line, and then finished the lyrics and keyboard parts during follow-up sessions in LA and at Fridmann's studio. "When You Die" is a post-apocalyptic slice of pop, with a catchy beat, groovy breakdown and some quirky themes. Lyrically, the album teeters between dark comedy and introspective, often isolated thoughts—"When You're Small" looks back at a time before "Kids" from a more removed perspective and the album's deeper cuts prove that MGMT haven't lost their knack for a good sound collage.

There's some jazzy organ work on tunes like "James" and a newfound appreciation of the funky, '80's sounds that scored their DIY dance-parties early on; the cartoonish "Me and Michael," MGMT's most bright-eyed, outwardly nostalgic banger since "Electric Feel," started out as "Me and My Girl" but Goldwasser pushed VanWyngarden to change the lyrics to something less obvious.

"The last album was so overflowing with sounds—chaotic, intentionally anxiety-inducing at times," VanWyngarden says. "We wanted to have more space [in the songs] this time. We were also writing the lyrics more quickly—that was a small change that felt different."

While the core duo of VanWyngarden and Goldwasser still recorded much of the album themselves, they brought in a few friends to help along the way, including avant-garde mainstay Ariel Pink, drummer Josh Da Costa and James Richardson, a longtime member of the MGMT live band. MGMT hosted a two-week jam session, with various players stopping by and laying down tracks, and then edited and sorted through the recordings later. "It's a pretty electronic record, but not in the same way as the last one—this one has a little more of a band sound," Goldwasser says. "It's more like how our first record was. That was also an electronic record, but like referencing rock music."

More than anything, *Little Dark Age* shares a cosmic, and sonic, connection with MGMT's pre-Columbia EP, 2005's *Time to Pretend*, which boasted bouncier versions of "Kids" and "Time to Pretend," as well as edgy, infectious nuggets like "Destrokk" and "Indie Rokkers."

"The way we wrote [*Little Dark Age*] was a lot more like how we used to write in college," VanWyngarden says. "One of us would have an idea, or just send over chords, bass and drums, and then the other person would add another part or the next section. We built the songs like that."

"We finally allowed ourselves to let something be simple and stripped down and leave space around things," Goldwasser afirms.

They both agree that enough time had passed since their breakthrough that they could start playing with those signature sounds again. "It was fun to get back to some things that we felt like we couldn't touch because there were so many bands doing that same synth-pop," Goldwasser says. "We never felt ownership over it in the first place—it ran away with itself. And, now, we just don't care as much. We're in our thirties and don't care what people think. It's like, 'Fuck it, we'll make synth-pop if we feel like it.'"

* * *

MGMT FINALLY RETURNED TO the stage in May of 2017. Their comeback appearance was in VanWyngarden's hometown at the Beale Street Music Festival and featured the live debuts of "Little Dark Age," "When You Die," "James" and "Me and Michael," as well as a new, glossy-eyed stage show. They settled back into life on the road by focusing mostly on festivals at first. "I started using just wedge monitors, instead of in-ear monitors," VanWyngarden says. "And it made a huge difference for me. I feel much more connected to the audience, and just the world of the concert."

Despite their initial hesitation to embrace their fame, both Goldwasser and VanWyngarden realize that their music has been the soundtrack for fans' lives and plan to offer fresh, but faithful song renditions—they promise you won't hear any banjo solos during "Kids." "I definitely want to avoid completely re-styling songs that are popular," VanWyngarden says.

Goldwasser's the first to admit that other forces played into their current, more upbeat sound and new, positive outlook. "Just being in a happier place—finding more happiness in my personal life, making a home—that's been really nice," he says. "New York wasn't ever the best city for me to live in. I grew up in the country so I was used to having more space and less people around me. I used to define my happiness by the music that I made because that was best thing I had going on, but I don't have to anymore. Now, it's something that I get to do instead of something that I stress over that has to be perfect. It feels looser, in a way."

MGMT's current goals are natural for a mid-career band of thirtysomethings. They hope to schedule out more time for collaborations and special projects—they both nod to Trent Reznor's career path as a current inspiration and want to figure out different ways to use pop music in the film world. VanWyngarden has a list of new venues he'd like to play and hopes to dig a little deeper into the catalog when he plays for hardcore MGMT fans later in the year. Goldwasser helmed Kuroma's 2015 album *Kuromarama*, a project led by former MGMT touring member Hank Sullivant, but isn't sure if he could see a future as a producer. "I can't decide if producing is something that I would like to really do as a job," Goldwasser says. "I start to lose interest if it becomes more work. At least for now we're trying not to go at it too hard on the road. We've learned that we burn out on tour if we do it too much."

And, more than anything, VanWyngarden seems to have come to terms with the fact that sometimes you can't choose what you're remembered for.

"I'm grateful that we've been able to sustain a long career—a lot of bands just come and go," he says. "But it'll always be strange, and never not be crazy to me, that its because of songs we wrote when we were 19 years old."

JACKIE GREENE'S BASEMENT TAPES

Following a move to the East Coast, the California singer-songwriter offers an audio documentary of his New York years. *By* **RAFFAELA KENNY-CINCOTTA**

ON AN early fall evening in New York City, a day before the release of his new EP *The Modern Lives Vol. 1,* Jackie Greene is conducting a Q&A for a small crowd at The Cutting Room. Eventually, and inevitably, the conversation turns to his tenure in a certain Southern rock band. "When I heard that you were going to be in The Black Crowes, I thought, 'That's kinda weird' because I didn't think of you in that way,"

Jay Blakesberg

the moderator says. Greene flashes a knowing smile and responds, "You thought I had no chops, man!"

Indeed, Greene has worn many hats over the years, from moonlighting in bands like the Crowes and Phil Lesh & Friends to a stint in the supergroup Trigger Hippy. After releasing his acclaimed 2002 debut record *Gone Wanderin'*, he was hailed as an acoustic laureate at the tender age of 21, eliciting comparisons to Bob Dylan. Later, while bolstering his prolific solo career, he opened for legendary guitarists like Buddy Guy and B.B. King, and also toured with Bob Weir's RatDog. All of these different roles (in tandem with his keen songwriting abilities and California-country vibe) have granted Greene the ability to cross genre lines and connect with fans from all walks of life. Eight studio records and countless tours later, he landed in Brooklyn in 2015 faced with yet another challenge. Used to California's wide-open spaces, the singer had to adjust to the noisy confines of New York City.

"I have a love-hate relationship with New York, as I think all New Yorkers do," Greene admits a few weeks after his Cutting Room show. Melding together country sounds with urban laments—as only a Californian-turned-New Yorker could—his new EP *The Modern Lives Vol. 1* wastes no time equating Times Square with a graveyard, and billboards with headstones, on opening track "Modern Lives."

"The *Modern Lives* project is basically my documentation of my New York years," Greene says, adding that volume two is already in the works. Recorded and produced last winter through spring, *The Modern Lives Vol. 1* was a kind of independent study for Greene. Its liner notes are singular, just the singer and whatever equipment he managed to haul from the West Coast. "I wanted to make something that felt, quite frankly, homemade." he says. "I did everything myself in my basement in Brooklyn. I played all the instruments myself."

And while it was a rewarding experience, Greene acknowledges that taking on all of that responsibility was a leap of faith. "It's a little bit scary to go into a project knowing you have to do everything yourself," he says. "But it's kind of like the pride you get when you build something in woodshop class."

Despite his previous experiences with home studios, his Brooklyn setup was particularly primitive—*The Modern Lives Vol. 1* was birthed next to a washer-dryer and storage space. "Professional is not a word I would use to describe it at all," he chuckles. In an extreme "exercise in patience," Greene spent his days writing and recording, hoping that the incessant clamor of New York City wouldn't pour through the subterranean room's small, street-facing window. "You could be doing a take and, in the last 10 seconds, someone's car alarm goes off outside. It's not ideal," he recalls.

* * *

FOR GREENE, WRITING IS recording; and the songs on *The Modern Lives Vol. 1* were documented every step of the way. If something didn't sound right at first pass, Greene would start over, trying out a different instrument or adding a bridge before proceeding to record it all over again. In the end, he says, tinkering with these musical "prototypes" allowed the final product to emerge.

"What ends up happening is there are four or five different versions of any given song. Because, over the course of

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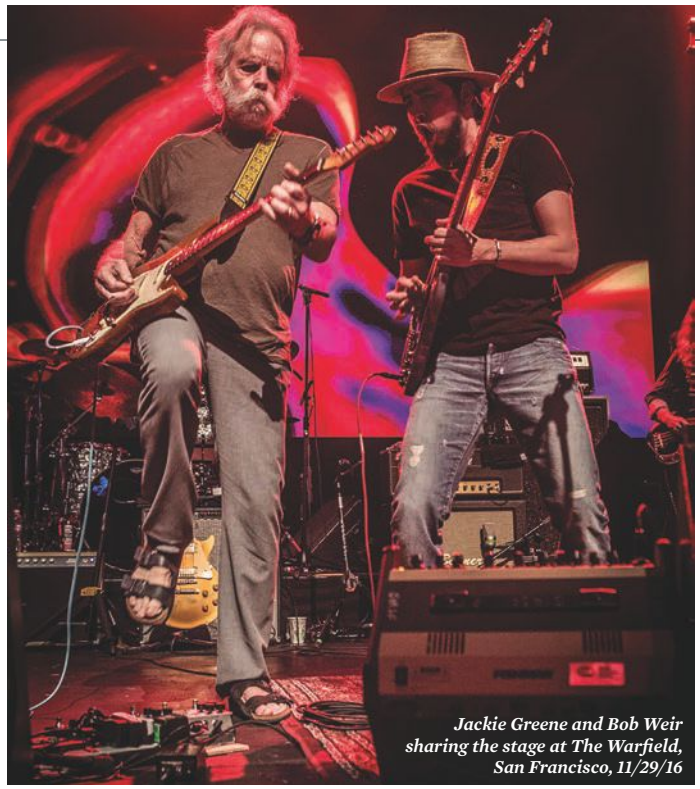
writing it, I've recorded it several different ways," he says. For instance, he can trace the growth of one song, "Tupelo," quite easily. The sparse, country-blues number went through revision after revision, evolving from a standard piano ballad as Greene pieced it together. "It wasn't as raw as I felt like it should be," he remembers. Laying down most of the song on his "crappy 8-track tape recorder," he tried reinterpreting it on acoustic guitar as a folk number, before changing the time signature and changing it back again.

Eventually, after distorting the drums through his guitar fuzz pedals and overdubbing some piano, Greene landed on the banjitar-driven number you hear on *The Modern Lives Vol. 1*. "It was dirtier and nastier [than the first take]," he explains. "That's all I'm looking for. I don't need a recording to be pristine or anything like that, I just need it to be emotional in some way, or to have a vibe of some sort." And knowing how to play multiple instruments makes the process even easier. "I'm carving away at the marble," he says.



Jackie Greene and Bob Weir sharing the stage at The Warfield, San Francisco, 11/29/16

Greene describes himself as a tactile learner, with plenty of hands-on experience in the recording studio as well as in front of an audience. He credits his musical growth and wide-spanning career with his willingness to accept every challenge that comes his way. "I've learned so many things from Phil & Friends that I wouldn't have learned anywhere else, and I've learned so many things from The Black Crowes that I wouldn't have learned anywhere else. And the same with playing with Levon Helm, Trigger Hippy or any of these other things I've been involved with," he says. "Maybe that's why I don't have a hard time being inspired. I feel inspired quite often, and I think it might be because I'm always saying 'yes' to all these different things."

Lesh officiating Greene's wedding at Terrapin Crossroads

His relationship with Lesh is particularly telling. Before he was enlisted as one of the bassist's Friends, Greene was unfamiliar with the Grateful Dead songbook and daunted by the idea of improvising on the spot. Joining up with Lesh, venturing outside of his comfort zone and diving into the jam world opened Greene up to new musical possibilities and christened him into the extended Grateful Dead family. (Lesh even officiated his wedding at Terrapin Crossroads in March.)

"I didn't know you could be that free onstage and take all those chances until I met Phil and started playing with him," Greene admits. "At first, I was very reluctant. 'What if things go bad? What if it doesn't work?' And Phil's attitude is, 'Yeah, sometimes it doesn't work, but you have to keep trying.'...I can't tell you how profound that is. That is a *profound* awakening. And I think I'm better for having that awakening."

And, as *The Modern Lives Vol. 1* hits, Greene is already finishing up the second volume, a more bluegrass, country-influenced set, as compared with the first EP's more bluesy sound. So far, he's pleased with his new partnership with Blue Rose Music, which enables him to churn out music faster than ever before—writing, recording and releasing EPs in a matter of months. "The closer I can get to having the music released with my current mindset, the happier I will be," he says. Then, he pauses, adding, "I think. I don't know. That's what I'm going for."

Greene is taking it one step at a time. For now, *The Modern Lives* project is alive and well, but the impending arrival of his first child with wife Jill means he'll probably be leaving the metro New York area in favor of more kid-friendly climes. Looking ahead, Greene has an open mind, using his past experiences to inform the future. Unphased by the industry's desire to define him by a single genre, his only goal is to make songs that speak his truth.

"I don't see a reason that I need to be just one thing. I've never agreed with that. I think it's OK to be a singer-songwriter and to make country songs or folk songs or blues songs or rock-and-roll songs, and then perform it in the context of a jamband," he says. "That's what the Grateful Dead are to me. It's a bunch of great songs by themselves, performed in a way that is nonstandard. I think that's part of the magic."

Stuart Levine (Weir and Greene); Jay Blakesberg (Lesh and Greene)

I'm With Her (and Her and Her): Sara Watkins, Sarah Jarosz and Aoife O'Donovan (l-r)

Shervin Lainez

WE THREE

After crossing paths for decades, longtime friends Sara Watkins, Sarah Jarosz and Aoife O'Donovan finally release their debut studio album as I'm With Her.

By **DEAN BUDNICK**

SEE YOU AROUND, the name of the forthcoming studio album from Sara Watkins, Sarah Jarosz and Aoife O'Donovan, encapsulates the spirit and origins of their I'm With Her project.

Long before they debuted onstage together in a trio format during a serendipitous, spontaneous set at the Sheridan Opera House as part of the 2014 Telluride Bluegrass Festival, their lives had entwined in innumerable ways.

"The three of us have so much history together," Jarosz affirms. "I first met Sara Watkins when I was nine, about to turn 10, and Nickel Creek was playing at the Old Settler's Music Festival outside of Austin [in 2001]. I had been given a mandolin for Christmas—I had been playing for a couple months, and I just thought Nickel Creek hung the moon. I was able to meet Aoife a few years later, when I was 15, at Rockygrass in Colorado. I'm an only child and she became something of an older sister to me. Sara and Aoife met each other in 2001 at the Philadelphia Folk Festival [when Watkins was 20 and O'Donovan was 18]. Over the years, we had all these moments, seeing each other at music festivals and jams. All of these short run-ins, all of that history, led up to that impromptu performance at the Sheridan Opera House."

Watkins shares her own perspective on these encounters: "I met Sarah at a picnic table after we'd done a workshop, but my most vivid memory of her is outside a venue, on the street. She would come to Nickel Creek shows and bring her mandolin. Nickel Creek would often play outside of the bus after a show and if we had a friend around who played, they would come play with us. I remember Sarah being about 15 and playing with her by the bus in the headlights before we pulled away. I remember thinking,

'She's gonna be around for awhile.' Then our paths crossed over the years.

"But the first time I ever sang with her was when we were rehearsing for this little workshop that we did during the day, before that evening set at the Sheridan Opera House. [The lineup at the Elks Park session also included Nicki Bluhm and Tift Merritt.] We asked everyone to get together to arrange a song or two for this workshop but Aoife and Sarah and I were the only ones who were able to get together. So we did, and we worked some three-part harmonies into 'The Darkest Hour Is Just Before Dawn,' and a couple of other songs—one of Aoife's and one of Sarah's—and it was really fun."

Jarosz adds, "I remember Aoife showing us her song 'Magpie.' That was a sparking moment, singing that song, which is in a weird time signature—it's not the easiest song ever—and all three of us kind of fell into it naturally. I remember thinking there was really something to this."

Events then took a turn a few hours later when Chris Thile texted O'Donovan and asked if she might be interested in pulling together an opening set for Punch Brothers that night at the Sheridan. O'Donovan decided to follow up on the euphony and rapport of the workshop rehearsals, sending her own texts to Jarosz and Watkins.

"To me, the specifics of it are less interesting than what ended up happening," O'Donovan reflects. "Chris asked, 'Can you come and do this thing?' But that seems like it doesn't matter at this point. What matters is that the three of us convened and worked up these songs. Then, we did this really fun show and that kind of turned into the band."

* * *

WHAT IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWED was a collective recognition that their instrumental affinities and their voices were not only complementary, but also resonant and mellifluous. So they decided to book a series of European dates in early 2015. They named their tour "I'm With Her" but soon discovered that people assumed it was their band name. (Their selection of this phrase predates its adoption as a Hillary Clinton campaign slogan, although they're certainly comfortable with whatever association folks have with the term.)

"At first, we were all just thinking, 'Oh, we'll do a few dates and this'll be fun,' not necessarily thinking that was the end, but not needing it to be any more," Watkins recalls. "But for me, that changed after our three-week tour when the three of us were driving around in a station wagon. We got along so well onstage and off. And our lifestyles fit together, which is a really big thing when you're in a band. We travel well together. We like the same foods, we enjoy towns the same way and we communicate well. So, for me, after that tour, I definitely remember feeling that we can do this, we can be a band. Life's too short to be in a band with people you don't really like. I've been so lucky that my primary band experiences have been very positive, but being in a band can be a challenging thing. Adults don't live with adults that often when they're not married. So it makes it all the more special when you fit together."

This experience led them to take another step toward a long-term commitment in July 2015 when they met at an Airbnb in Los Angeles to collaborate on some original material.

"It was a very natural process," O'Donovan reveals. "Even just in terms of arranging music, when we first got together to arrange 'Crossing Muddy Waters' and 'Be My Husband' for the EP that we put out [in May 2015], there's just such an immense amount of respect that we all have for each other. It makes it so easy to be sitting in a room and listening to one another's ideas and not being too attached to our own ideas, going with the flow and letting the music be the most important thing in the room. I think that same thing happened when we started to write together. Somebody would bring the beginnings of a song and be very open to other people's suggestions. That can be really hard when you're a songwriter. You already have an idea of how a song should go, and even if you want to co-write, it's easier said than done. With the three of us, it's very natural. I honestly can't remember, for most of these songs, whose idea was whose."

Five months after their efforts on the West Coast session, they reconvened in an altogether different environment, ensconcing themselves in rural Vermont for eight days in December. While they were focused on the task at hand, they did have an opportunity for a sip of the local color in the form of Heady Topper, an imperial IPA of national reputation that is available in limited quantity.

"We were really close to where Heady Topper is brewed, and right down the hill of the house we were staying in is a place called East Warren Community Market. It's a five-minute walk down a dirt road and they got Heady Topper every Tuesday. And we were there over two Tuesdays, so we were able to each get two four packs each Tuesday," O'Donovan affirms.

As for the songwriting process, Watkins adds, "We each brought song starts to the table. We would play an idea for each other and see what the other people gravitated toward. I was just so pleased that Aoife and Sarah found something in some of my ideas to build on and bring those songs to completion. For instance, I'd messed around with 'Ain't That Fine' several times but it was reworked for this album because some of these sentiments weren't necessarily what all of us would really want to sing in a song. I find that when I'm co-writing, one of the things that helps is that you have to explain your thoughts to somebody. When I'm writing by myself, I feel like I know what I'm saying, and sometimes what I think might be obvious is not necessarily obvious to the listener. An image that matters to me might not be as effective to someone else. When you co-write with someone, you have to discuss what you actually need, what your intent is. A lot of times, as you find your way through that conversation and with the help of your co-writers, the original idea can evolve into something much bigger and much better. I found that that was the case here quite often."

* * *

AFTER COMPLETING THIS material, it came time to identify a producer who could best serve the new body of work. The trio set their sights on Ethan Johns (Ryan Adams, Laura Marling, Ray LaMontagne) with whom Watkins worked briefly back in 2000 on *Mutual Admiration Society*, the album that paired Nickel Creek with Toad the Wet Sprocket's Glen Phillips.

Jarosz cites Johns' work with Marling, as well as Adams' *Heartbreaker* album as particularly significant, explaining, "I feel like Ethan's genius is in capturing dynamics on a record, which I think, especially nowadays, is easily lost. Everything can start to feel very horizontal—there's no movement dynamically. I think he really has a gift for that. At the end, that's what I appreciate most, and I think that comes through."

So they traveled to the tiny village of Box, near Bath, England, to work with Johns at Peter Gabriel's Real World Studios. There, they were initially surprised by his decision to record the tracks live without headphones. The three performed in close proximity to one another, with Jarosz on mandolin and banjo, O'Donovan on piano and synth, and Watkins on fiddle and ukulele.

O'Donovan acknowledges, "He's an audiophile who has an insane set of ears, but his work process is very different from what I was expecting. I

"I felt like the tour had the perfect amount of planning and impromptu moments thrown into it," Jarosz says of the trio's time on the American Acoustic outing. "From the first to the last show, we were all thrilled to still be doing it together."

Rene Heumer

had never made a record where I didn't use headphones or where there was no isolation at all. It was a little bit jarring on the first couple of days, but what Ethan wanted was to capture us as a band. He took us out of our comfort zone, which took a couple of days to get used to, but the end results speak volumes. The rawness of it creates the texture and this sort of lush quality that you can't get from layering instruments and overdubbing."

"There were some tense moments, but I think that's the case with every good record," Watkins affirms. "When you're in a room with three people and no headphones, it kind of puts you in a different head space. Your first instinct is: 'I don't want to mess up. I'm playing one foot away from my band. Any mistake that I make in front of my microphone will also be in their microphone. So I'm affecting the whole song.' When there's a wall between you and every other musician, any mistake that you make is just your mistake and it won't necessarily affect anybody else—you can fix it later, and there's a comfort in that. But when you're in close proximity with the other musicians in the room, you're listening differently, you're performing differently, and if you can perform these songs without being timid or chicken, and you can still improvise boldly and be confident, then you're likely to get a really good performance.

"A lot of bands, especially acoustic bands, will say that you never sound as good onstage as you do backstage because backstage, you're playing to each other—you're facing each other in a circle, or a triangle—all of your sound is going to your bandmates. This is how musicians naturally play. When you're straight out in a line onstage, it sometimes can be harder to find that tightness and really gel in a way that's as good as those moments backstage. When we were in the studio, there's a similar effect, and I think that the record sounds much different than it would if we had recorded in a more isolated, stale kind of way. But it was a great experience."

See You Around showcases this intimacy and interplay. The record soars through its rich harmonies and stirring instrumentation. This is especially true of the breakup ballad title track, the contemplative "Ain't That Fine," the ethereal "Wild One" and the concluding tune, a cover of the previously unreleased Gillian Welch song "Hundred Miles" that looks to the future with resolve.

The three musicians will return to Europe in early 2018 to support the record, before embarking on their first US headlining dates in late February. This summer, they joined Punch Brothers and Julian Lage on the American Acoustic tour, in which they appeared as a group and also with the larger collective. (Their communal take on The Beatles' "Julia" was a favorite of artists and audiences alike.)

"I felt like the tour had the perfect amount of planning and impromptu moments thrown into it," Jarosz muses. "From the first to the last show, we were all thrilled to still be doing it together. And just thinking about the history of it all, it really felt full circle. I can remember Chris signing my program at Old Settler's when I was nine and saying, 'Let's jam some time.' That was the turning point for me, where I said, 'OK, I have to get good enough to play with Chris Thile.' Over the years, I probably knew Chris better than Sara, but this band has been a beautiful excuse to get to know Sara Watkins."

This sentiment is certainly reciprocated, which bodes well for the future of I'm With Her. As Watkins notes, "They're becoming two of my closest friends. I don't think that any of us is looking for a one-project-forever kind of scenario—I think we'll all want to do more solo records, and we'll all probably go out with other projects for the rest of our lives. At least I hope so, because one of the beautiful things about this life that we have as musicians is that we can try and contribute and be a part of many different projects. So I think we will definitely want to do solo records down the road. But I also think we'll be a band for a very long time—possibly for the rest of our lives—in that we will always be able to come back together.

"Nickel Creek is something that will always be a part of my life," Watkins continues. "Even though many years can go by without a project, we're still a band. I think that I'm With Her is going to be a similar feeling for me because we all just love it. For now, we're all dedicated to this band being the focal point of our touring lives for this album cycle, and we're going to work really hard behind it. And at the end of that, who knows? Maybe we'll do another album or maybe we'll do solo records and come back to this, but I don't think this band is going anywhere."

ONE OF THESE LIVES

Vance Joy jumped from intimate clubs to iconic stages, thanks to a tour with Taylor Swift and an infectious single. Now, the 30-year-old singer-songwriter is out to prove that sensitive indie-folk still has a place on the pop charts.

By **JUSTIN JACOBS**

IT'S A MID-Autumn day and Australian singer-songwriter Vance Joy is sitting in a small Airbnb in Venice Beach, Calif., with his closest friend, drummer and co-producer Edwin White. UberEats just delivered some vegetarian food, and both are anxiously awaiting the moment when they can dig in.

White begins discussing his friend's songs—universally relatable, warmly emotional, acoustic ballads that have, in the past few years, shown up on seemingly every wedding playlist in the Western world. And that's when White stands up, and walks briskly out of the room.

"One of the new songs has a lyric, 'when big trees fall, they leave a space in your sight,'" White recalls, standing outside now. He begins to cry. It's a hushed, choked cry. His voice breaks in half. "My mom died last year, so I attach a lot of these lyrics to my life at the time. I think all of Vance's fans do that as well. I'm closer than anybody to this music, and I'm pretty sure I'm having the same experience with his songs that the fans do. I guess I'm just a lucky Vance Joy fan."

Back inside, 30-year-old Joy doesn't know that his best friend is weeping over his work. He's sitting alone, planning out his week in California, where he'll record some of the very last touches to his upcoming second record, *Nation of Two,* set for release on Atlantic Records in February 2018. He's acutely aware that thousands of fans—who are still buzzing from his ubiquitous mega-hit "Riptide"—have been waiting over three years for the album. A whole crew of managers, label reps, handlers and producers are eager to hear some new music, too.

Joy doesn't seem to care. He doesn't operate on their schedule. The songs come when they come—those emotional peaks that mark nearly every song can't be artificially created. "I've squeezed everything out of myself that I possibly could," he says calmly. "And I can finally feel myself relaxing a bit."

Frankly, it's hard to imagine him any other way.

* * *

VANCE JOY WAS BORN JAMES Keogh and came of age in a suburb of Melbourne, Australia. A true child of the '90s, when Joy was young, he fell under the spell of direct, immediate bands like Metallica and the Red Hot Chili Peppers and preferred sports to books. He played guitar but hated theory, and spent weeknights with friends hashing out riffs. In his twenties, he was successful in the Australian Football League while working side jobs.

Early on, he landed on the moniker Vance Joy, separating his footballer life from his musical one, as much for practicality as for style.

"My last name is pronounced 'Key-Oh,' but I thought people would read it wrong. I wanted something more striking, immediately recognizable," he says. He lifted Vance Joy from Peter Carey's book *Bliss* because, "It could actually be a real name, but it's a bit more mystical."

Newly minted, Joy gigged around Melbourne alone with his acoustic guitar. Then he wrote "Riptide," and everything changed. He had been kicking around fragments in his head for years but, in 2012, the whole thing materialized, and Joy knew he was onto something. Comments on the demo he posted on social media only reinforced his intuition.

White, in the meantime, had been backpacking and surfing his way through Southeast Asia on the way to a new career in England.

"James rang me and said, 'I'm going to do music and make a go at it. If you wanna do this with me, come back. It's time,'" remembers White.

The two hit the studio and worked out the modest five-song EP *God Loves You When You're Dancing,* and "Riptide" was soon trickling across the sea through some very important headphones—including those of Atlantic Records' A&R Senior Director Stefan Max.

"It's a one-listen song," says Max, who is also camped out in Venice Beach to help with Joy's final sessions. "The sixth sense kicks in and you feel that song. Seven seconds into it, you have goosebumps."

Joy was signed to a multi-album deal before his debut was even recorded—and by the time *Dream Your Life Away* dropped in 2014, "Riptide" was already a growing hit. Then the Taylor Swift tour happened, and everything changed again.

The pop icon was launching the tour for her inescapable *1989* album, and Joy was invited to open. The decision for a brand new, soft-spoken and effortlessly humble folk singer to tour with one of the world's biggest stars wasn't straightforward—at least not to his growing team.

"The whole discussion of should we or shouldn't we was hilarious, to be honest," says Max. "There were 15 people sitting in a room, between his management and the label. Lots of strong opinions, arguing back and forth. But it was his decision. And he saw no downside—he said he'd do it in his own way."

And how, exactly, does one tour with Taylor Swift on their own terms?

"He was never willing to totally play the game like Ed Sheeran did—hanging out with Taylor, posting on Instagram every day. And because of that, he didn't get as big an impact as he probably could've," says Max. "But still, the Taylor effect is undeniable."

Overnight, Vance Joy jumped from playing clubs to stadiums, strumming through his understated, often-whispered folk tunes.

"It was such a learning curve," laughs Joy. "Before, I'd spent my gigs looking at my feet, just getting through it and wondering when it would be over. But I began to enjoy the connection with the audience more—really seeking it out, actually. I saw how good a show can be watching Taylor; she made me want to deliver so much more."

The tour behind *1989* kept Joy on the road for most of 2015, after which he spun off into his own headlining gigs. "Riptide" kept rolling as an international hit, climbing the charts in nearly 20 countries—subsequent singles like "Georgia" generated their own heat and *Dream Your Life Away* was selling millions. In less than two years, Vance Joy had become a bona fide pop star, playing ukulele and acoustic-guitar-driven folk that was arguably more suited to a coffee shop seating 10 than a stadium holding 10,000.

"It's a mysterious thing when a song arrives," Vance Joy says of his process. "You turn up every day waiting for it. But it's never a straight line."

Justin Bettman

And all the while, Joy was waiting, patiently and calmly, for his new songs to arrive. Label and management pressure was already mounting before the tour with Swift even wrapped—to keep the momentum, to grow the hype, to stoke the fire. By mid-2016, Joy had two finished songs, and a phone full of notes and voice memos, unconnected to each other.

"It's a mysterious thing when a song arrives," says Joy. "You turn up every day waiting for it. But it's never a straight line. It's a bunch of squiggly lines to that final destination. And a lot of good stuff happens when you're not trying too hard—ideas, melodies, lyrics. But to completely finish a song, you have to hack away at it. You sit down and smooth away the edges; you put different ideas together. It's not studiousness, but craftsmanship. I turn over every stone to get to the song. The ideas may come free-form but, at some point, you've got to do the manual labor."

He worked with a conveyor-belt mindset throughout 2016 and into 2017—as a song matured to its final form, he'd head into the studio and record it. He never truly gave himself time off; he was either traveling from studio to studio, or camping out and "chipping away," as he says. Joy laid down the tracks in the New York Catskills region, Seattle and Malibu, Calif.

"Over a year and a half, we created this patchwork quilt of songs," says White.

Joy chewed over lyrics and melodies for weeks, months sometimes, until each song captured the emotional punch that'd become his calling card—the gorgeous, warm-embrace that helped "Riptide" garner more than half a billion plays on Spotify and almost 200 million views on YouTube.

"I know when it hits me in the chest. When I'm in the ballpark, I can sense it," he says. "If I can sing a line with conviction, that's the sign post. I don't have to try too hard; it just pours out. It's instinctual. If a song penetrates me, if it feels intimate to me, I know people will have an emotional reaction."

"With the storytelling in James' songs, it's very simple language. These are everyday experiences that everyone has, and there's an anchor for people to relate," says White. "We try to make every song universal. We think about what we're trying to get across, then enhance that so people experience it as much as possible."

* * *

VANCE JOY CERTAINLY ISN'T the first singer-songwriter to tap deeply into human emotion, but he is rare in his aversion to misery. His songs never ache like a Ryan Adams tune; they don't wallow like Elliott Smith or poetically mourn like Conor Oberst.

"He's got sad moments, but it never feels like you've got an empty bottle of Jack Daniels next to you. There's hope at the end of any of his sad stories," says Max.

That broad appeal is obvious at his shows. "His concerts are 18-to-35-year-old date nights," laughs Max. "You see a lot of couples, and a lot of smiles and emotion on display."

But where *Dream Your Life Away* presented a collection of similarly mellow, clear-eyed folk, *Nation of Two* sets its sights higher, with more rousing choruses, varied percussion and lots and lots of horns.

The album's first single, "Lay It on Me," builds on an instantly catchy melody and a simply plucked guitar before ramping up to an explosive, propulsive chorus that's more electrifying than any of his earlier work. On the sweeping "One of These Days," Joy cries over echoing percussion and buzzing horns, "Wherever you go, you'll be in the right place/ You'll never know the difference it makes/ When you let go and give up your chase/ I'll come find you... one of these days," and you can feel an army of slightly unsteady, hopeful twentysomethings fondly remembering their exes and reassuring themselves that everything is going to be alright.

It may be in the album's title, though, that Joy most fully manifests the feeling his music creates in listeners. He took the phrase "nation of two" from novelist Richard Ford's recent book *Between Them: Remembering My Parents*—though he later realized it was coined by Kurt Vonnegut.

"[Ford] dedicates the book to his parents, the life they shared together, the love they had," says Joy. "Before he was born, his dad was a traveling salesman. He'd drive around the country, and his wife would go, too. They lived on the road, in their own world. He describes that time, before he was born, as so sacred. They were a nation of two—two people who are self-contained, self-sufficient. The world exists only up to the edges of the bed they sleep on."

It's easy to picture the couples at any of Vance Joy's shows, wrapped up in each other's arms. If "Riptide" isn't theirs, then surely another handful of Joy's songs are.

When he begins the sparkling, gorgeous, new song "I'm With You," he sings, "I saw you standing there/ Sandy blond hair/ The way you came tumbling down just like a waterfall/ And if you need a light/ I'll be the match to your candle—my darling/ I'm ready to burst into flames for you," and those arms squeeze a little tighter.

"I was just coasting till we met. You remind me just how good it can get," he sings, and thousands of eyes meet, reflecting the bright stage lights. Vance Joy has done exactly what he set out to do.

DEEP HUES

After striking Grammys gold with his intimate folk-indebted masterpiece *Morning Phase*, Beck returns with a kaleidoscopic blend of indie, funk and hip-hop beats—and may have crafted his version of a career-defining legacy album along the way.

By **RYAN REED**

BECK Hansen had a pretty clear creative MO this year—work relentlessly hard to make effortless-sounding music.

"I was trying to write very simply in a sort of classic approach," he says of his 13th LP, the neon-tinted *Colors*. "This sort of blueprint of The Beatles and Michael Jackson and the great, simple pop music. Ultimately, I kind of went halfway between that and what I do—I found a middle ground. But I wanted to challenge myself to be simple. And it's really hard. It's hard to have it feel personal and direct without being trite and clichéd."

The genre-hopping singer-songwriter/studio rat spent roughly four years toiling over the project, obsessing endlessly over an ever-expanding batch of material with frequent collaborator Greg Kurstin (now a mega-pop producer for Sia, Kelly Clarkson and Adele). In a given week, the duo might rework one song dozens of times, splinter off the chorus into a new track, then scrap the whole arrangement and start fresh after landing on an exciting lyric or keyboard patch. One of their breakthrough moments was stumbling on a "pretty cheesy" retro pan-flute synth tone, which highlights the electro-pop blitz of both "Wow" and the title track.

"It was similar to how, in the '90s, I would say, 'Hey, let's do a fuzz guitar'—one of those thin '60s guitar sounds," he continues. "But that was not a cool guitar sound! It was the whole era of post-hair-metal/grunge. I was like, 'Let's use the littlest, pinky-dink fuzz sound.' I got this old, vintage guitar pedal, the Fuzz Phase, and was like, 'That's the sound!' It's something you'd hear in 1966 in a bad spy movie

Eliot Lee Hazel

or something. That felt so far out from what people were trying to do at that moment that it felt exciting. Somebody has to recontextualize, and [Justin] Bieber was able to do that on the flute [on 'What Do You Mean?']."

It's slightly bizarre to hear Beck—the man who once scoffed in song, "MTV Makes Me Want to Smoke Crack"—casually suggest that the world's biggest pop star beat him to a creative punch. But it's emblematic of the journeyman's musical headspace these days. Everyone has their own favorite Beck mutation: the post-grunge rap-folk renegade of *Mellow Gold* and *Odelay*, the campy funk-rock buffoon of *Midnite Vultures*, the forlorn singer-songwriter of *Sea Change* and *Morning Phase*. But the visceral thrill of Beck fandom is following him through these stylistic twists, never knowing which side of his split personality will crash the party. Now, after two-and-a-half decades of subverting expectations, he's taken his most daring creative leap—making his most linear, accessible music to date.

With *Colors*, Beck set out to craft his version of a career-defining legacy album—a collection of note-perfect, immaculately sculpted pop songs without any awkward vocal takes or lackluster mixes. "I wanted to have one of those records where I knew I pushed as hard as possible," he says. "Every artist has that one record where they poured everything they had into it. It doesn't necessarily mean it's the best record, but it's the record where you know they went as far as they could in the writing and production—The Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's*, The Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds*, Michael Jackson's *Thriller*, Peter Gabriel's *So*, Paul Simon's *Graceland*—something meticulously thought out and worked on. I wanted to do something like that. With a lot of my records, I'll just make music and listen for things that have a little bit of a spark. A lot of times, I'll end up using the rough vocal that wasn't even a very good performance—it just felt true to the moment. This time, I said, 'Nothing's sacred. I'm not gonna feel tied to anything. No ideas are sacred, and anything can be thrown out and redone to try to make it better.'"

Kurstin, with his jaw-dropping pop pedigree, was the perfect sounding board and co-writer. They've also been close friends and collaborators for well over a decade: He joined Beck as the live keyboardist on his 2002 *Sea Change* tour, and he later recorded numerous overdubs on 2006's *The Information* and 2008's *Modern Guilt*, not to mention loads of unreleased music.

"We kept playing together but, at that point, I hadn't put out a record in about five years," Beck says of their partnership. "I'd created this whole body of songs on my own for a number of years, and I wanted a fresh start, so I shelved all that music and felt like, 'Maybe I'll get back to this later.' It was a much more experimental body of work. Greg and I always enjoy working together, but it's usually with another producer in the room, like Nigel Godrich or Danger Mouse or The Dust Brothers. So it was almost like the kids were left to their own devices."

Throughout the recording process, Beck had a front-row view of Kurstin's own career explosion. "I was in the room with him when he got the call that his song ['Hello,' which he co-wrote and produced] got on the Adele record and was gonna be the first single," he says. "It was one of those *moments*. I remember telling him: 'Your life just changed.'"

Despite the obvious camaraderie, their process involved a lot of trial and error, as they holed up in the studio and performed many of the instruments themselves, aiming for optimism and verve after the dour mood of Beck's last LP, *Morning Phase*. "I consciously had much darker lyrics originally," he says of his new direction. "But I was trying, with Greg's help, to stay away from the heavier lyrics and make something that was a little more uplifting. That was the real goal of the record."

He succeeded. These are Beck's hookiest, most user-friendly songs to date—perfectly suited to surge out of arena speakers and across festival grounds. Take the falsetto-laden electro-rock of "I'm So Free" and "Dreams," or the Lennon/McCartney-esque stomp of "Dear Life," which sounds like a modernized "Lady Madonna" with a fuzz-guitar solo that's somehow catchier than the vocals. Even the solitary ballad, the pensive "Fix Me," is layered with luminous glockenspiel and piano.

Thematically, Beck says, the album may have struck more of a cultural nerve if he had released it two years ago, back before the 2016 Presidential Election and the residual worldwide paranoia from the Trump presidency divided the American populace into packs of rabid wolves. *Colors* offers a medicinal power; instead of holding up a mirror of hope, it's a soothing distraction.

"I was in the studio with Pharrell when he was just finishing up [his ubiquitous 2013 hit] 'Happy,'" he says. "He played it for me when it was in progress. If that song came out now, you might say the same thing about it. We were working on our records at the same time, and I was also feeling this message of brightness and hopefulness.

"We were going to put out the album last fall, but it felt like things were heating up in the culture and in politics," he continues. "I felt like it was a bad time, so we held it back another year, which was probably a good idea. I think if it had come out when it was supposed to, it would have gotten lost in the shuffle. People's thoughts and attentions were elsewhere, and I try to be sensitive of that kind of thing. I don't think I anticipated, when we were doing the songs, that we'd be in this different era, but here we are. [Similarly], I had all the songs and was ready to record *Sea Change*, and we were gearing up for it, and then 9/11 happened. So it just felt like the right time to step away for a year and come back to it. With this record, it was also smart to step back."

Releasing the album earlier may have been a smarter commercial move—a case of striking while the iron was sizzling hot—but *Colors* still arrives at an important juncture in Beck's career. Sure, he's been a critical darling and massive tour attraction since redefining alt-rock in the early-'90s. But he's currently riding an unexpected wave of renewed mainstream exposure after *Morning Phase* won Album of the Year at the 2015 Grammys. (During Beck's dazed acceptance speech, Kanye West created a viral-worthy moment by pretending to bum-rush the stage—a reference to the rapper's notorious 2009 VMAs incident, in which he grabbed Taylor Swift's Best Female Video trophy and ranted about how Beyoncé was robbed for the award. Notably, in a post-Grammys interview, West protested that Beck "[needed] to respect artistry" and "should have given his award to Beyoncé.")

"I had so much going on," he says of his *Morning Phase* hot streak. "I've been touring. We got all these offers after we finished the last album cycle. After the Grammys, so many things happened. I was doing benefits and playing at [Lou Reed's] Rock and Roll Hall of Fame [induction ceremony]. I got all kinds of festival offers, so things got really busy. That became the more important thing to do than finish the record."

* * *

FANS HAVE KNOWN FOR YEARS that this album existed—at least in some form. In 2013, *Rolling Stone* reported that Beck was working on two LPs—the "acoustic" release that ultimately became *Morning Phase* and another set described by an insider source as the "proper follow-up to *Modern Guilt*." As the months

Lauren Dukoff

passed without any news of this mysterious companion record, *Colors* seemed destined to collect digital dust on a hard drive somewhere, among his scores of other unreleased LPs.

"For most of my records, there's another album or two of [unreleased] stuff," he says. "I just don't release all of it. I'm a little more picky. Before I made *Odelay*, I did two or three kinds of records. I did something that was a bit more acoustic and somber—my attempt at a Big Star, singer-songwriter '70s thing. I did another that was very guitar-based, very indie-rock, influenced by the music of that time: Pavement, Sebadoh, Guided by Voices."

You wouldn't think that free-for-all recording rule would apply to *Morning Phase*, considering that *Colors* was already starting to take shape at the same time. You'd be wrong. "There's a whole bunch of Nashville country songs that I'd recorded originally," he says. "There's another record of stuff that sounds kind of bucolic and folky and has a little more energy—more strummy. But when I started getting songs like 'Morning' and put it together with 'Wave' and 'Waking Light,' I decided, 'I don't want to put that other stuff in here. There's something happening with this new stuff.' Maybe some of those other songs will see the light of day. Maybe the world doesn't need to hear it."

Regardless, Beck is sitting on a potential goldmine of unreleased material. Around 10 years ago, he went hunting through his massive archive and was shocked to discover that much of his unused material was more or less professional quality. "I thought some of them were demos, but I realized, 'Wow, this is mixed!'" he says, laughing. "I started remembering, 'We worked really hard on this! This is a record!'"

> "I wanted to have one of those records where I knew I pushed as hard as possible."
> **BECK**

But Beck is willing to scrap an album or two if it isn't hitting his often blurry bull's-eye. "I can go back to *Odelay* and *Guero*, and there are versions of those songs where the vocals are sung perfectly on a much better microphone—clearer, more forward," he says. "But there

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REVIEWS

Compiled by MIKE GREENHAUS

Bob Dylan

BOB DYLAN

Trouble No More: The Bootleg Series Vol. 13/1979–1981 COLUMBIA/LEGACY

Bob Dylan has courted controversy since the beginning of his career, whether walking off the set of *The Ed Sullivan Show* rather than sing a more user-friendly song or, of course, going electric at Newport and ruffling many a folkie feather. But to many of his most ardent supporters, the so-called Christian period of 1979–81 was the most baffling and misunderstood. With the release of 1979's *Slow Train Coming* album, followed by *Saved* and *Shot of Love*, Dylan plugged into Jesus, turning his pen into a tool for the Lord. Dylan turned his back defiantly on nearly all he'd done before, eschewing his older material in concerts in favor of his new gospel-rooted ones, alienating many loyal fans who openly expressed their disdain for this latest twist. Those fans, in particular, should give *Trouble No More*—an 8-CD/1-DVD collection, all of it previously unreleased—a chance. Distance from the source reveals that Dylan was as passionate and fired up as he'd ever been—some of the live performances, which comprise the bulk of the set, are as intense as any he'd given before, while the music on the "Rare and Unreleased" discs offers insights into the creation of the music he was pursuing (as does the DVD, a film chronicling this corner of Dylan's bio). By 1981, Dylan was ready to re-integrate some of his familiar works, and classics like "Maggie's Farm" and "Girl From the North Country" sit comfortably side by side with "Gotta Serve Somebody" and "Man Gave Names to All the Animals" at a London concert. Some Dylan-philes will never warm to this patch of his history, but those open enough to give it a shot are likely to be surprised at just how brilliant—and forceful—it is. *Jeff Tamarkin*

Mavis Staples

Mickey Hart
RAMU VERVE

If you know only one thing about the Grateful Dead's **Mickey Hart,** then it's probably that he's the mastermind behind the band's divisive mid-set "Drums" and "Space." And whether you love them or designate them as bathroom-break time, it's undeniable that Hart is an absolute joy to watch—he's the twisted, mad scientist to Bill Kreutzmann's straight man. And on *RAMU*, his latest release, Hart has created a deliciously meandering, melodic exploration, with a whole cast of more contemporary voices to add some ecstatically fun spice to the global drum experience. It's like "Drums" and "Space" with an all-star backing band of internationals and aliens.

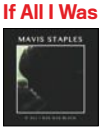
RAMU is short for Random Access Musical Universe—the enormous collection of sound samples that Hart has amassed over the decades. The percussionist has loaded this database to an actual rhythm machine, and its neon colors are all over these songs, from squelching synthesizers to found sounds, instruments from across the globe and, even, the "sonification" of light signals from stars. As far as album stories go, it's hefty. Thankfully, this 12-song collection is total, freewheeling fun—all lunging rhythms, slithering jazz, bubbling beats, stacked vocals and foggy atmospherics.

Pretty Lights collaborator **Michal Menert** lent his services to the set, which also boasts **Zakir Hussain** on tabla, **Oteil Burbridge** on bass and **Steve Kimock** on guitar. Hart is perfectly matched with Animal Collective's **David Portner** aka **Avey Tare**, whose ethereal voice lends a wobbling liftoff to the echoing electronics and chugging low-end of "Wayward Son." On the very next track, **Tarriona "Tank" Ball**, of New Orleans funk newcomers Tank and the Bangas rips into Hart's seesaw rhythm with a vicious, rapped Trump diatribe. And on "Wine Wine Wine," Hart pairs Alan Lomax field recordings with gorgeous, aqueous saxophone. It's a weird moment, but a wonderful one. Stick around for "Drums" and "Space" this time. You won't be disappointed. *Justin Jacobs*

Neil Young + Promise of the Real
The Visitor REPRISE

It's not your imagination: **Neil Young** has been unusually prolific these past few years, releasing some four new albums plus a collection of "lost" 1976 recordings between the summer of 2015 and the end of last year. Three of those new releases—*The Monsanto Years*, the live *Earth* and now *The Visitor*—find Young in the company of the 29-year-old **Lukas Nelson** (Willie's son) and his band **Promise of the Real.** POTR is the best fit Young has had since aligning with Crazy Horse in the late '60s and *The Visitor* is their most exciting and far-reaching collaboration to date even if, as is Young's MO these days, it appears to have been slapped together on the fly. That, in fact, is its greatest strength: Unlike the forgettable *The Monsanto Years*, Young and POTR delight in mixing things up and seeing what might stick. So while the 72-year-old Canadian is all fired up about the leader of his adopted country on the album's scathing, lumbering opening track, "Already Great" ("No wall, no ban, no fascist USA"), by the shuffling, acoustic "Change of Heart" the mood is lighter and the "walls that you hide behind" are of a more personal nature. The album-closer "Forever," too, is tender enough to have come off of the 1972 *Harvest*. Like Crazy Horse, though, POTR (once again augmented by Lukas' brother **Micah**) sound their best when they are fully cranking, like on "Children of Destiny" and the anthemic "Stand Tall," proving once again that Neil Young has no intention of ever letting up. *Jeff Tamarkin*

Mavis Staples
If All I Was Was Black ANTI-



On **Mavis Staples'** third album with Wilco's **Jeff Tweedy** in the producer's chair, she sings with the chin-held-high strength and perspective of someone looking back on a life well-lived, even as she comes to grips with how fragile it has always been. *If All I Was Was Black* took shape against the current socio-political backdrop of racial tension and violence in America that has become all too reminiscent of the civil rights era—a grim parallel that inspired Tweedy when he wrote the album's 10 compact songs, and which fuels Staples' interpretation with a stunning range of emotions. She can sound wistful on "Ain't No Doubt About It" ("Sometimes I have the answers/ But my questions get taken away"), hopeful on "We Go High" ("Gonna stand side by side/ Our hearts in command") and even angry on "Who Told You That?" The set also serves as a snapshot of Tweedy's production ability, with a tight rhythm section and backing singers behind him, to capture the brooding darkness of Sly Stone's *There's a Riot Goin' On* (complete with a raggedy drum-machine patch to set the tone). Staples is at her positive best on the title song, imbuing simple lines like "It's time for more love" with the heart-rending grace, beauty and devotion of her gospel roots. Considering all the things she's seen since growing up on Chicago's South Side, where giants like Sam Cooke, Lou Rawls and Jerry Butler were her neighbors, it's a ton of soulful weight to carry, and worth every step she takes with it. *Bill Murphy*

Jim James
Tribute to 2 ATO

In the days following George Harrison's 2001 death, **Jim James** grieved the only way that made sense: through song. Armed with an acoustic guitar and a cheap reel-to-reel, the My Morning Jacket frontman quickly reinterpreted a handful of the former Beatle's most beloved songs, reducing anthems like "Long, Long, Long" and "Love You To" to ghostly laments on *Tribute To*. Sixteen years later, James is back at the covers game with *Tribute to 2*, a pseudo-sequel—but only in methodology, not in mourning. Instead of deliberately honoring the dead, the singer-songwriter simply reworks some of his favorite songs for the hell of it—from Elvis Presley's gospel ballad "Crying in the Chapel" to Emerson, Lake and Palmer's folk-prog standard "Lucky Man." The track list is dizzying enough to showcase James' diverse taste, and it's fun tracing the influence from these tunes to his own catalog: Take his spaced-out, vintage soul version of The Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds* meditation "I Just Wasn't Made for These Times," which could have slotted in smoothly on his latest solo LP, 2016's *Eternally Even*. Whether he's digging for deep cuts (jazz crooner Al Bowlly's "Midnight, the Stars and You," outfitted with jaunty saloon piano and creepy detuned vocals) or paying homage to the obvious giants (a twangy take on Bob Dylan's "I'll Be Your Baby Tonight," highlighted by woozy steel-guitar), James consistently reshapes the material to suit his psychedelic headspace. *Ryan Reed*

King Gizzard and the Lizard Wizard
Polygondwanaland
ATO

On *Polygondwanaland*, **King Gizzard and the Lizard Wizard** keep right on lizard wizardin' on the Australian band's fourth album of 2017. The nearly 11-minute "Crumbling Castle" opener seems to suggest a breakthrough for the happily conceptual and prolific act, containing all the ratcheted-up, double-drummer, mosh-pit-inducing surf-punk frenzy at the core of the group's live shows, yet with new layers of minimalist rhythmic subtlety. Nothing else on *Polygondwanaland* quite bends the rules in the same way, but instead, coils the new intricacy inwards, like the interlocked parts and stacked vocals of "The Castle in the Air." Hampered only occasionally by the narrative drag that made *Murder of the Universe* a slog for nearly all but the most dedicated Gizz-heads, the 44-minute album holds together with the confidence of a band that has clocked its share of hard hours conceptualizing, arranging, practicing, recording and touring in a cycle so fast that the five actions are perhaps now indistinguishable. Even at its most prog-minded, like the start-stop flute-topped "Loyalty," the album achieves the rare feat of moving with both the logic of how bodies churn together in mosh pits, but also the way the ear carries a listener through an album. Rich with acoustic guitars, lead bass, vintage-sounding synths and constant left turns, the lyrics likely interlink with what Reddit-congregating fans have dubbed "the Gizzverse." More relevantly, with a through-line of propulsive fun, *Polygondwanaland* manifests the lizard-wizarding world whole: a magical mystery Gizzverse, coming to take you away. *Jesse Jarnow*

Beck
Colors CAPITOL

Beck Hansen: anti-folk icon, alt-rock renegade, indie-funk prankster. Now, in 2017, he's discovered his least likely role to date, the un-ironic pop star. After three decades of purposely zigging where the mainstream zagged, Beck embraces the slick, arena-friendly bounce of popular radio with his 13th LP, *Colors*. The timing makes sense. He hasn't been this embedded

in the pop conscience since the Clinton administration, having won Grammy Album of the Year for his folky 2014 set, *Morning Phase*. So Beck sought out to craft his *Thriller*, his *Rumours*–a note-perfect LP without the raw first takes and left-field experimentation that defined albums like *Odelay* and *Guero*. He and co-writer/producer **Greg Kurstin** put in some sweat on that quest, spending nearly four years fine-tuning these 10 songs, paring down the arrangements and stripping away lyrical ambiguity. The strain paid off and every track here–with the exception of "Wow," a cringe-worthy electro-pop digression with the most irritating "rapping" of Beck's entire career–is crammed with hooks upon hooks. And they cover a deceptively wide amount of stylistic terrain in the process: "Dreams" and "I'm So Free" are garage-pop anthems lifted by sumptuous falsetto swoons; the title-track weaves pitch-shifted EDM vocals and pulsating synth-flutes into heavyweight art-pop; elsewhere, there are bursts of McCartney-esque music-hall piano ("Dear Life"), psychedelic piano chime ("Fix Me") and stabbing funk guitars ("No Distraction"). Even at his most "conventional," Beck can't help but keep you guessing. ***Ryan Reed***

Khruangbin

Con Todo El Mundo DEAD OCEANS

On their second LP, *Con Todo El Mundo*, Texas-based (but globally conscious) trio **Khruangbin** offer up a soundtrack to a grindhouse cult classic not yet filmed. A hazy Technicolor blend of Iranian funk, Latin rock and bleary-eyed soul, it's a record custom-built for summer. Comprised of bassist **Laura Lee,** guitarist **Mark Speer** and drummer **Donald "DJ" Johnson**, Khruangbin specializes in tasteful touches–guitars dripping with reverb, crisp backbeats, a rumbling low-end and only occasional vocals, which take on organ-like resonance via Leslie speakers (or a suitable approximation thereof). While the band's previous album, 2015's *The Universe Smiles Upon You*, was rooted in Thai and southeast Asian styles–gleaned from tapes the trio played on long car drives–*Con Todo El Mundo* makes more overt moves toward American funk, though Speer's sprightly guitars maintain a panglobal omnivorousness. "Como Te Quiero"–or "How I love you"–oozes lowrider oldie ambiance, while "Evan Finds the Third Room" rides an early hip-hop groove–think the Tom Tom Club meets Shuggie Otis. Single "Maria También" feels like something that Tarantino might conjure up in a fever dream, a steady sashay of interlocked bass, guitar and propulsive handclaps. It's spacey music but never unrhythmic, uniformly tasteful but not predictable, either. On "Lady and Man" the band rides a steady, vibraphone-enhanced groove for a whole four minutes, only introducing ebullient group vocals–"I coulda been a doctor/ Coulda been a lawyer/ Oh come on/ Not that again"–in the last fizzy minute. ***Jason P. Woodbury***

Vulfpeck

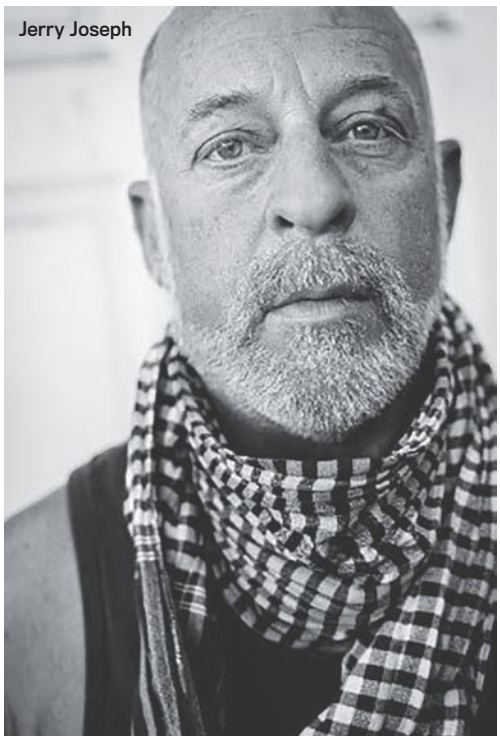
Mr. Finish Line VULF

Vulfpeck are officially part of the funk A-list. The credits to their spastic third full-length LP, *Mr. Finish Line*, are just as elite as the grooves. Funkadelic bassist/singer-songwriter **Bootsy Collins** appears on the adorably goofy "Captain Hook," and two of soul music's most iconic session players–drummer **James Gadson** and guitarist **David T. Walker**–assist on the suave ballad "Grandma." Given the quartet's elite chops, it was only a matter of time. Ever since their viral video breakout in 2011, these onetime Michigan music students have gained traction–and famous fans–with each album, marketing stunt (their silent Spotify release, *Sleepify*, which funded an entire admission-free tour) and lo-fi YouTube clip. Here's the rub: Vulfpeck are so damn funky on their own that these cameos often feel like unnecessary muscle-flexing or name-dropping, a distraction from the joyous grooves everyone came to hear in the first place. *Mr. Finish Line* relies too heavily on guest vocalists, famous or not–like **Coco O.**'s bland crooning on "Business Casual," which suggests The Jackson Five on Mars, or **Charles Jones**' overwrought belting on "Baby I Don't Know Oh Oh," a not-so-distant cousin of "Bennie and the Jets." Vulfpeck clearly relish the thrill of collaboration, but their songs are better without it. When these dudes let loose instrumentally, like on the disco-jazz rave-up "Tee Time" or the dirty 1970s sitcom-theme strut of "Hero Town," they reach a peerless funk plane. ***Ryan Reed***

Van Morrison

Versatile LEGACY

It's been many years since the arrival of a new **Van Morrison** album was considered a notable event–these days, like several other survivors from rock's golden era, he's likely to slap together whatever he's got on hand and quietly toss it out there, hoping that his old fans will find out about it. *Versatile*, the Irish bard's 38th studio album in all, is a good one for that, continuing where its predecessor, *Roll With the Punches*, left off–mining the Great American Songbook instead of vintage R&B and adding in six new Morrison compositions just to reassure those returnees that he can still write a song. Among those, "Broken Record," which opens the session, is the keeper, a swinging


Jerry Joseph

affair that could easily be mistaken for a late-'40s jumper, were it not for the singer's trademark repetitions of the title phrase (how appropriate) and distinctively non-traditional phrasing. However, the standards are the true heart of the release. Although everyone from Bob Dylan to Rod Stewart to Willie Nelson to Carly Simon have given tunes by the likes of Cole Porter and the Gershwins a go, Morrison frees himself up to have fun with them, even while bowing respectfully. His take on Frank Loesser and Jimmy McHugh's "Let's Get Lost" provides a more jubilant alternative to Chet Baker's rendition, and to marvel at him extending a syllable over a couple more bars than others would even think to–in "I Left My Heart in San Francisco," of all songs–is to remember why there is simply no one else like him. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

MGMT

Little Dark Age COLUMBIA

MGMT were never comfortable as indie-pop breakout stars. With their skyscraping synths and effortless melodic charms, early hits "Kids," "Time to Pretend" and "Electric Feel" positioned **Andrew VanWyngarden** and **Ben Goldwasser** as hipster heroes of a rarefied air. But the duo shrugged in the face of mass appeal, exponentially multiplying the left-field psychedelia and knotty progginess on their second and third LPs, 2010's *Congratulations* and 2013's *MGMT*. Those albums felt like purposeful course corrections–either aural apologies to their inner art-rock geeks or flipping a double-bird to the radio programmers desperate to pigeonhole their music. For whatever reason, MGMT finally decided to satiate our pop cravings with *Little Dark Age*. The title track is gothic electro-funk with synths blurring the line between Herbie Hancock and Tangerine Dream; "When You Die" tethers dissonant guitar harmonics and bleakly comic lyrics ("I'm ready, ready, ready to blow my brains out") into joyously pogoing power-pop; "Me and Michael" is a glassy, mid-'80s synth-pop heartthrobber–an unironic soundtrack selection for any high-school prom scene in a retro romantic comedy. Good news though: They haven't sacrificed *all* their weirdness in this pivot toward accessibility. They're still prone to eyebrow-raising chord changes (the jazzy Rhodes of "James") and wild arrangement flourishes (the random classical-guitar solo on "TSLAMP"). Over a decade deep into their head-scratching career, MGMT sound reinvigorated on *Little Dark Age*–unburdened by the commercial pressures of their past and experimental enough to still sound like they don't give a shit. ***Ryan Reed***

Dopapod

MEGAGEM SELF-RELEASED

Dopapod open their newest palindromic record *MEGAGEM* with the funkified tour de force "Plaese Haalp," and while the jamtronica quartet have always amalgamated into sonic harmony, this seven-minute rager is one of their best tracks to date. Intertwining razor-sharp guitar riffs with space-age basslines and cinematic strings, "Plaese Haalp" is a musical saga worthy of its track one placement. Over 40 minutes, the LP maintains its punch, whether it's on the smooth bilingual standout "Mucho," or the slow-burning instrumental "Buster Brown." Dopapod recorded and self-produced *MEGAGEM* in the mountains of Colorado, improvising constantly and distilling those sessions into the eight songs heard here. It's clear that after years of tinkering, **Eli Winderman**

and **Rob Compa** have solidified the band's signature out-there sound, with synth modulation and prog-guitar galore, as bassist **Chuck Jones** and drummer **Neal "Fro" Evans** hold down the rhythm department. *MEGAGEM* is the band's fifth studio output (not counting their myriad of live releases) and, musically speaking, Winderman, Compa, Jones and Evans are solid as a rock. Even after pulling their best material for this record, they still have another album's worth of songs in the chamber. Nevertheless, Dopapod have been on the road too long, and an upcoming, year-long hiatus was necessary to prevent a full-blown burnout. It's a hard pill to swallow for fans, but you have to believe Winderman when he sings, "We are right where we belong," on album-closer "Starfish." Yes, a year is a long time to be without Dopapod, but *MEGAGEM* is the perfect parting gift. *Raffaela Kenny-Cincotta*

Bettye LaVette

Things Have Changed VERVE

Bettye LaVette approaches her album of Bob Dylan covers the same way that she always makes a song hers: by burrowing deep inside, then finding her way out from the bottom up. Songs from the classic rock canon are not new to the veteran soul songstress. On 2015's *Worthy*, she wholly reimagined tunes by Lennon-McCartney, Jagger-Richards and Dylan. Prior to that, her recordings included material by Elton John, Led Zeppelin and The Who. She's got an innate sense of how to retain the core of these compositions while personalizing them so definitively that you'd swear she wrote them today if you didn't know otherwise. *Things Have Changed* presented a special challenge: Dylan's songs have been remade so many times, by such a wide range of artists, there was no guarantee she'd find a new route to them. But with the production guidance of master drummer **Steve Jordan** and a crew of ace players, including Dylan alum **Larry Campbell** on guitar, **Pino Palladino** on bass, **Leon Pendarvis** playing keyboards and assorted guests including **Keith Richards** and **Trombone Shorty**, LaVette nails the dozen tracks. It helps that she didn't go for the obvious. With a couple of exceptions ("The Times They Are A-Changin'"), LaVette combs the corners of the catalog, coming up with songs like "Seeing the Real You at Last" and "Emotionally Yours" (both from 1985's *Empire Burlesque*) and the early "Mama, You Been on My Mind," all perfect matches for her expressive, well-burnished voice. Sometimes all it takes is Bettye LaVette to remind us of what's been right under our noses all this time. *Jeff Tamarkin*

Jerry Joseph

Weird Blood CAVITY SEARCH

Jerry Joseph claims a respectable reputation as a heartland troubadour—one whose deeply rooted conviction makes him musical kin to Springsteen, Fogerty and Mellencamp. He's an assertive artist who's unafraid to rail against outrage and injustice in an increasingly tattered world. Backed by his usual outfit, Joseph's output remains as effusive as ever, whether engaging in the anthemic rant that accompanies "Sweet Baba Jay" ("Now we're burning the sage and enchantments/ Recanting the blood in our bones"), surging on the strength of the petulant and persistent "3-7-77" or slowly slinking his way through the sprawling blues of "Wild Wild West." However, as ominous as the music sometimes seems, Joseph's not afraid to let his vulnerable side show. The cooing gospel choir that softly chimes in on the rocksteady "Think on These Things," the delicate dying embers of "Buddha Jim," and the ragged-though-resilient "Late Heavy Bombardment" speak to both his commitment and concern. "I will never let you down... til the day that I die," he promises on "The Eyes," and indeed, given the resolve that *Weird Blood* brings to the fore, there's never any cause to doubt his word. *Lee Zimmerman*

Brian Fallon

Sleepwalkers ISLAND

It's been two years since **Brian Fallon**'s debut solo album, so hearing his New Jersey-fueled rock-and-roll through the speakers again on *Sleepwalkers* feels like a welcome relief. With The Gaslight Anthem and on his own work, it's never been about Fallon reinventing the wheel or pushing the boundaries of rock. His music is grounded and authentic, replete with sincerity and tangible passion. For him, it seems to be about simply making solid rock songs that feel timeless and relatable. This album, like on the musician's prior releases, harkens back to elements of the '50s (as well as, occasionally, the '70s and '80s), but Fallon uses these vintage elements as inspiration rather than as the foundation for his work. "Forget Me Not" is full of spirit and stomp, the bluesy sort of rock tune that has garnered Fallon comparisons to their pal and scene patriarch, Bruce Springsteen. "My Name Is the Night," on the other hand, slightly pulls back on the vigor, allowing the singer to howl and croon poetically inclined lines like, "My name is the night honey/ So color me black." There's a real Tom Petty vibe throughout, especially on "Come Wander With Me," a thoughtful number perfect for a road-trip sing along. Fallon exudes a noticeable amount of energy in these tracks, giving the listener a real sense of his care and enthusiasm for the songwriting and performance. He believes every note, so you do too. *Emily Zemler*

Julian Lage

Modern Lore MACK AVENUE

Although he is often—correctly—described as one of the most innovative jazz guitarists today, **Julian Lage** isn't pigeonholed that easily. *Modern Lore*, Lage's second album with his trio (bassist **Scott Colley** and drummer/percussionist/vibraphonist **Kenny Wollesen**), opens with "The Ramble," four minutes that rock hard, and ends with "Pantheon," a dirge-paced meditation that revels in its airiness and deftly filled spaces. In between, it goes here and there without a care for category. Lage has come a long way since he was first introduced to the world as a child prodigy; now 30, he's an adventurer whose playing style is still absorbing new ideas even as he's begun to influence others. "Roger the Dodger" is one of several groove-oriented jams that allow Lage to exploit his clean, sharp lines; his collaborators understand instinctively where he's heading next, and are right there alongside him. The trio is augmented on several tracks by keyboardist **Tyler Chester**, who adds nuggets of subtle soulfulness on tunes like "General Thunder" and Revelry" without ever getting in the way of the core players. Producer **Jesse Harris** also steps into the contributor's role on a few songs, adding Casio, acoustic guitar and maracas. Julian Lage is the kind of musician who adapts comfortably to any number of settings, but he's at his most impressive on recordings like *Modern Lore*, when he's quietly assertive, keeping it simple and letting the music unfold at its own pace. *Jeff Tamarkin*

Miguel

War & Leisure

BYSTORM ENTERTAINMENT/RCA

On his fourth album, **Miguel** enlists some of hip-hop's more relevant artists to accompany his smooth-talking R&B numbers. **Rick Ross** joins him on "Criminal," *War & Leisure*'s opening track, where the rapper counterbalances Miguel's sultry croon with a few grit-laden rhymes. **J. Cole** and **Salaam Remi** appear later on "Come Through and Chill," lending an edgy tone to the otherwise silky ballad. It's not that Miguel can't hold his own—*he can*—but it makes the singer's evocative vocals even more effective when he juxtaposes them with something sharper. The singer maintains his love for soulful, funk-infused R&B throughout, particularly on songs like "Pineapple Skies," a rollicking, '70s-esque tune and on "City of Angels," a bluesy number with a subtle Southern twang. The musician is at his best on the slower moments where his emotional intentions can come through in every note he sings. "Anointed" is sparsely wrought, allowing his voice to carry the melody, and there's an intensity to the singer's enactment. It's sexy, but not blatantly so—a sense that carries over into album closer "Now." This final track, with its moody appeal, has a distinct intimacy. It's stripped of heavy pop production and feels like an in-the-moment performance in a small, shadowed room as Miguel murmurs "Is that the look of freedom, now?/ Is that the sound of freedom, now?" It feels like you're there with him, which is a memorable way to conclude an album. He doesn't need his peers here, but their presence only makes this last moment so much stronger. *Emily Zemler*

Greg Jamie

Crazy Time ORINDAL

As leader of gothic folk acts O'Death and Blood Warrior, Maine-based singer-songwriter **Greg Jamie** specializes in mood and suspense. On *Crazy Time*, his first solo outing, he shakes none of that haunted old-world spookiness that defined his previous work, but augments it with a sense of otherworldly humor. "This life/ Is almost too figured out," he sings on the bass-driven "This Life"—his shaky voice positioned somewhere between Neil Young and Damien Jurado—but the paths of the record are twisting and quizzical. Recorded primarily at Jamie's home studio in Portland, Maine, the songs drift from droning waltzes ("Bells of Victory") to loping psych-pop ("When I Get Home"). It's most often restrained, with reverb-soaked guitars accompanying thudding drums and indeterminable noises, but the mood remains intriguing, benefiting the freaky sonic space that Jamie, along with co-conspirators **Colby Nathan** and **Greg Hartunian**, conjure up. Even at their most placid, threads of menace and danger skirt the edges of Jamie's scenes: The ominous nods to sin, nakedness and shotguns in opening meditation "Inherit the Wind," the browning fields of a land grown cold, and hungry beasts to ward off. But it's not all doom. The songs also celebrate the arcane triumphs that dot a life lived outside the margins—the kind of glee that surviving a cold New England winter might inspire. "The things we choose to hear/ Are echoes through the night/ We were alive," he sings, over slide guitars and a stomping beat on "Bells of Victory." *Jason P. Woodbury*

Björk

Utopia ONE LITTLE INDIAN

"My healed chest wound/ Transformed into a gate/ Where I receive love from/ Where I give love from," **Björk** sings

at the start of "The Gate," the first single from *Utopia*, her ninth studio LP. Released late in 2017 (with free cryptocurrency), the record's a direct response to the pain at the core of her previous, *Vulnicura*, a set destined to join *Here, My Dear* and *Shoot Out the Lights* on "best existential breakup albums of all-time" lists. Teaming up again with electronic producer **Arca**, she inverts the resignation of *Vulnicura* on songs like "Blissing Me," a celebration of a blossoming romance between "two music nerds obsessing." A complicated document of sexual redemption, nature and resilience, *Utopia* often feels sonically untethered. Verses and harmonies float in and drift out, rarely adhering to verse/chorus structure, accompanied by electronic fluttering and processed birdsong. The beauty feels weightless, but Björk's words land with heft, focused on healing–and tearing down–structures of toxic masculinity. "Not repeating the fuck-ups of the fathers," she sings on "Tabula Rasa," also labeling the patriarchy a "Kafkaesque farce" on "Body Memory." It's a record explicitly tied to the wounds of *Vulnicura*, but it's not centered on escaping sorrow or injustice, as much as it is about finding the tools to address them in one's own body. In a cultural landscape littered with dystopian visions of our future–as feels realistic–Björk presents a daringly hopeful vision of tomorrow, resistance rooted in radical tenderness: "Soft is my chest, I didn't allow loss/ Loss make me hate, didn't harden from pain." *Jason P. Woodbury*

Hollie Cook

Vessel of Love MERGE

On her third album *Vessel of Love*, vocalist **Hollie Cook** brings an inventive spirit to traditional lovers rock. Sun-dappled and warm, it's something of a mutant record, grafting dream-pop textures and bustling electronics to a firm foundation of dub reggae and rocksteady. On her first two solo outings, Cook partnered with producer Prince Fatty, putting tasteful, bottom-heavy tropical pop to tape. But for her debut recording for North Carolina's Merge Records, she teams with **Youth**, best known for his genre-hopping work with Killing Joke, Paul McCartney and David Gilmour. Opener "Angel Fire" quickly establishes their approach, marrying electronic swirls and whirls to horns and rumbling bass. It's experimental, but thoroughly lovely, too–album standout "Survive," a sweet cocktail of floating harmonies, vocoder-altered vocals, bouncing bass and candid musings, is so breezy that it threatens to float off into the air. Those who came to Cook via her work with the Slits (or with the expectation that the daughter of a Sex Pistol might rage a little harder) will likely be surprised at how exceptionally smooth and polished things sound, but tracks like "Turn It Around" and "Ghostly Fading" bring some tricky post-punk to the table, and there's a punkness to unabashed expressions of joy in the face of world sorrow. "Have we gone too far/ Am I letting you down/ Do we even known how/ To turn it around," Cook sings, maybe in reference to a soured love affair, or maybe as a comment on the state of the world. The question rings out either way. *Jason P. Woodbury*

Noah Gundersen

White Noise COOKING VINYL

Two years ago, **Noah Gundersen** made a dramatic leap forward with his songwriting on his second album, *Carry the Ghost*. It was largely slept on–which is a shame because he was displaying a real sense of rawness and honesty that's rather difficult to find these days. On *White Noise*, he's upped the ante a bit, where the sad-sackery approach he took last time is largely cast aside for something more revved up and immediate. Like in the past, you get the sense that Gundersen is searching for meaning in life, whether it's through other people, his role as a professional artist or himself. But the differences this time shine through in the arrangements. Highlights include "The Sound," a charging '80s rocker that would have been great in a John Hughes montage scene, the keyboard-infused "Heavy Metals" and "Number One Hit of the Summer (Fade Out)," a call to arms of sorts, with Gundersen declaring, "When everybody's watching you drown/ So fade out." Gundersen's current heights can be heard on "Cocaine Sex & Alcohol (From a Basement in Los Angeles,)" a mid-2000s Radiohead-sounding experimental ballad about a guy feeling so out of place at a cool Los Angeles party. "Get me out, get me out of the light," he begs early on. The song soars for seven minutes and is one of his most experimental numbers to date. Tempos shift, orchestrations flutter and Gundersen is sort of singing, sort of just running through his mind on a rough night where he's just trying to keep up. It's a place we've all been at one point or another. *Mike Ayers*

Ear Crystals BY RICHARD GEHR

The search for other-world audio gems

Up from the bassment. The ghost of Jaco Pastorius benignly haunts *Elevator Man* (RareNoiseRecords), the third solo album by the Italian bassist **Lorenzo Feliciati**. A low-end horn section–trombone, bass trombone and baritone saxophone–lends a saturnine glory to memorable themes, and the playing is consistently virtuosic. It's sort of like Steely Dan jamming with Weather Report, but without a moment of schmaltz. Drummer **Chad Wackerman** lends a confident Zappa vibe to "The Brick," and there's no end of dazzling guitars slicing through Feliciati's jazz-rock noir. "Does it have its ups and downs?" you ask. Please.

The calm after the storm. Punctuated by her signature storytelling, **Laurie Anderson and Kronos Quartet**'s *Landfall* (Nonesuch) suggests a documentary soundtrack. Five years after Hurricane Sandy, these 30 tracks, ranging from less than a minute to almost 10 minutes in length, pack little immediacy. The strings and electronics chug along mournfully, but most will want to hear this for Anderson's uncharacteristically terse anecdotes and *aperçus*. "Don't you hate it when people tell you their dreams?" she asks before relating a story that sounds a lot like a bad dream. Would Anderson have created this calmly resigned work if her own basement hadn't flooded and transformed her possessions into junk? "I thought to myself: 'How beautiful, how magical, how catastrophic.'"

Emerald pretties. Way out there on the neo-New Age tip, you'll find **Taylor Haskins & Green Empire**'s *The Point* (Recombination), a warmly weird album of lava-lamping instrumental space-folk. The group's sound is a retro-futurist blend of **Brett Lanier**'s drifting pedal-steel guitar and Haskins's analog EVI, an electric valve instrument (built by Nyle Steiner) that's basically a synthesizer played like a trumpet. Accompanied by guitarist **Michael Chorney** and the rest of **Hollar General**, Haskins paints sonic impressions of life in the Adirondacks. His synth hovers like a flying saucer above Lake Champlain in "Palisades," cuts through the murk with tart astringency in "Trickle Charge" and serenades optimistic back-to-the-landers in "Theme for a Farmer."

Faring well. Keyboardist and accordionist **Hailu Mergia**, a member of Ethiopia's acclaimed Walias Band during its '70s heyday, mutates the piano-trio format on *Lala Belu* (Awesome Tapes From Africa), the expatriate's first album of new material in about 15 years. (*Hailu Mergia and His Classical Instrument* is a standout reissue.) Alongside drummer **Tony Buck** and bassist **Mike Majkowski**, with whom he has been playing since his "rediscovery," Mergia blends accordion, synthesizer and piano sounds to create a solid grooving hybrid of pentatonic Ethiopian melodies and gutbucket jazz-funk. Ten-minute opener "Tizita" twists and turns in a manner suggesting the part-time Washington, D.C. taxi driver's own surprising career.

Aviator's Tale. As **KADAWA**, guitarist **Tal Yahalom**, double bassist **Almog Sharvit** and drummer **Ben Silashi** play a type of skilled, telepathic jazz that sounds best when they're roughing it up in improv-rock territory–as on "Aviator's Tale," a highlight of their eponymous self-released debut (Kadawa.com). The trio met at Tel Aviv's Center for Jazz Studies and moved together to New York, where they play around town in various configurations. Trumpeter **Adam O'Farrill** adds oomph to tracks like "Shades of a Happy Ending," a rollicking, carnivalesque foreshadow of Kadawa's potential.

Jerry Douglas Band

What If ROUNDER

For decades now, master dobro player **Jerry Douglas** has helped make legends *legends*, most notably Alison Krauss. And because of that in-demand nature that he's cultivated over the years, his own music as a leader comes in time. *What If* is Douglas' first release with his group, a seven-piece that has Douglas front and center throughout. Their approach to recording was simple: Mix a heavy dose of jazz with bluegrass and, at times, some more rock influences and see where that ends up. *What If*'s 11 tracks are a mix of cover tunes and Douglas originals–some new, some penned back in the day–reworked with this group. And while it's hard to find fault in anything that Douglas does, some of the tunes here work better than others. When Douglas is exploring that jazz aesthetic deeper, say on album opener "Cavebop," or on the more mellow tunes, "Go Ahead and Leave" and "Butcher Boy," there's a poignancy that shines through immediately, reminiscent of his old pal Béla Fleck or Bill Frisell. Some of the tracks feature Douglas on lead vocals, like "Hey Joe" and Tom Waits' "2:19." These moments can trip you up if you're not expecting vocals, and you wonder if they would work just as stand-alone instrumentals. Still, those are minor complaints. As a debut album, *What If* fits easily into Douglas' vast catalog and demonstrates why he's always been in demand: He can flip a composition effortlessly, whether it's his own or a cover, and make it sound pretty radical. *Mike Ayers*

Gregory Porter

Nat "King" Cole & Me BLUE NOTE

Ask **Gregory Porter** to name his vocal influences and he'll reel off a long list from within the worlds of jazz, R&B and gospel. But towering above them all is the late Nat "King" Cole, to whom Porter's own mother compared him when he was starting

out. It's an apt appraisal: Like Cole, Porter possesses a naturally rich and honeyed tone that serves as aural comfort food. That Porter should choose to dedicate an entire album to this mentor makes perfect sense; that he does so with an abundance of class and style isn't a surprise either. Working with pianist **Christian Sands**, bassist **Reuben Rogers** and drummer **Ulysses Owens**, as well as arranger **Vince Mendoza** and the **London Studio Orchestra**, Porter transforms Cole standards like "Nature Boy," "Mona Lisa" and even "The Christmas Song" ("chestnuts roasting on an open fire...") into his own tunes with ease. The orchestra, of course, imbues the performances with coloring and context but, in the end, it's Porter's vocal delivery that carries the interpretations: He's so commanding a presence, and so clearly in love with these songs, that he could have performed them a cappella with equally thrilling results. On the ballads—"But Beautiful" (included on the Deluxe edition only) and "Smile" among them—Porter is delicate and intimate, while the uptempo numbers, including the swinging "When Love Was King" and "L-O-V-E," find him riding high above the orchestration. Mendoza's arrangements are a tight fit for Porter, who embraces the task of honoring Cole with the relish and respect the artist deserves.

Jeff Tamarkin

First Aid Kit

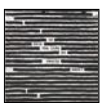
Ruins COLUMBIA

Swedish country-folk sister duo **First Aid Kit** burst onto the scene—seemingly out of nowhere—five years ago with their second album *The Lion's Roar*, exemplifying a warm, captivating studio sound that most veterans would love to attain. And they did so by taking music back to basics: Top-notch harmonies, mixed with down-home storytelling and apt metaphors about relationships, sounding as if they were plucked straight out of California in the '70s. *Ruins* is the band's fourth album and continues down that same path but, this time, there's a maturity shining through, where life isn't as rosy as it may have once been. Most songs exist in a mid-tempo range, with gorgeous orchestral flourishes throughout, and many explore a longing for someone else—someone who was once there but now is clearly gone. On album opener "Rebel Heart," they look inward, singing, "But I know you truly saw me/ Even if just for a while/ Maybe that's why it hurts now/ To leave it all behind." The pedal-steel lined "Postcard" wrestles with falling for someone, parting ways and the complicated feelings you have when you're trying to let go. And on "Distant Star," those sentiments are echoed once again, as they declare, "But you're a distant star/ My darling you're so far away/ You were never meant to stay." But that's what ruins are—memories of something that once existed, a physical reminder of something great you can point at, yet know isn't quite the same. First Aid Kit's *Ruins* is kind of like that. *Mike Ayers*

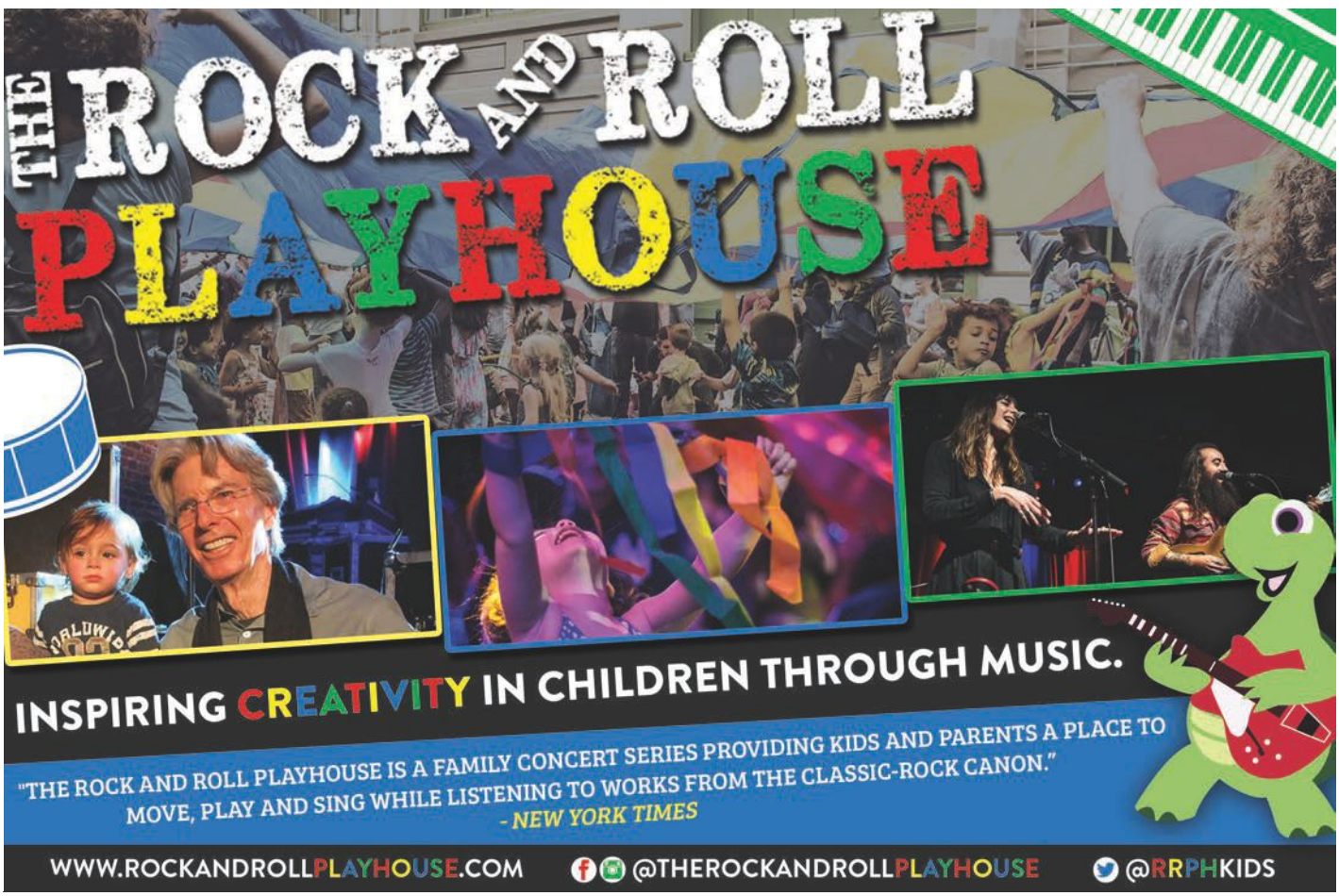
Roger Waters

Is This the Life We Really Want?

COLUMBIA



There's really no one making music today who enjoys the intersection of politics and spectacle as deeply **Roger Waters**. That notion landed with all the subtlety of an alien invasion during his "Us + Them" tour this past summer (or more memorably, his Desert Trip set in 2016); while performing the Pink Floyd classic "Pigs (Three Different Ones)," giant images of Donald Trump in various states of Warhol-inspired ridicule flashed across the stage. When conservative-leaning fans in America's heartland raised a stink, Waters had the perfect rejoinder: "There was a very small number of people who were upset that I was lampooning the nincompoop," he said. "Go see Katy Perry or watch the Kardashians. I don't care." Sure, he's prickly, defiant and uncompromising, but that's what makes *Is This the Life We Really Want?*—Waters' first straight-up rock album since 1992's *Amused to Death*—worth spinning. The atmospheric links to Floyd's masterwork *Dark Side of the Moon* are present and palpable, thanks in no small part to longtime Radiohead pal **Nigel Godrich**, whose production stroke leans more toward lush classic rock and pristine acoustic spaces as he gets older. The real meat and pudding, though, resides in the sharp-minded lyrics, from the brooding anger of "Déjà Vu" ("The temple's in ruins, the bankers get fat/ The buffalo's gone and the mountain top's flat") to the wartime horrors of "Smell the Roses" ("There's nothing but screams in the field of dreams/ Nothing but hope at the end of the rope") and beyond. It's all unremittingly dark, offset by an equally recurrent commitment to rhythm—laid down with aplomb by bassist **Gus Seyffert** and drummer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1 Lukas Nelson & Promise of the Real

"Forget About Georgia"
From the album *Lukas Nelson & Promise of the Real*
Fantasy Records

Since their formation as teenagers, Lukas Nelson & Promise of the Real have developed into one of America's most dazzling live acts, playing hundreds of shows both on their own and backing Neil Young. Lukas, son of country-music legend Willie Nelson, contributes impressive, intelligent songwriting that deserves to be considered free of his father's legacy.

lukasnelson.com

2 Taken by Canadians

"The River"
From the album *Taken By Canadians*
Blind Owl

Taken by Canadians' new self-titled album is a starkly beautiful, vitreous and vibrant immersion into the unmistakable swagger of Southern California. Elegant in its raw vulnerability, the group soars high above the Golden Coast with genre-defying sincerity and timeless rock and roll. Available now from Blind Owl.

takenbycanadians.com

3 The Mallett Brothers Band

"Long Black Braid"
Single
Self-Released

The Mallett Brothers Band's tour schedule has helped them build a diehard fan base across the country. With a style that ranges from alt-country to Americana, to jam and roots-rock, it's a musical melting pot that's influenced equally by the singer-songwriter tradition as by classic country and psychedelic sounds.

themallettbrothersband.com

4 Shred Kelly

"Archipelago"
From the album *Archipelago*
DevilDuck Records

Soaked in electric crescendos and folk-tinged sing-along anthems, Shred Kelly is known for their high-energy live show that ignites dance floors with their alternative folk sound. They have taken inspiration from the mountains where they hail from, presenting a sound that is both unique and compelling.

shredkelly.com

5 Underhill Rose

"Love Looks Good on You"
From the album
The Great Tomorrow
Self-Released

Harmonies. Soul-touching lyrics. Friendship. Get to know the joyful, soaring voice of Molly Rose and her guitar, and Eleanor Underhill's open-back banjo and salty-blues vocals. With their song-centered original compositions, Underhill Rose creates rootsy Americana music that is real and inspired from the mountains of N.C.

underhillrose.com

6 Alastair Greene

"Dream Train"
From the album *Dream Train*
Rip Cat Records

Alastair Greene recently embarked on a full-time blues-rock, jamband career after seven years touring the world as guitarist for prog-rock legend Alan Parsons. *Dream Train* features 12 Greene originals and a previously unreleased Billy Gibbons song. Special guests include guitar-hero Walter Trout.

alastairgreene.com

7 Kalu and the Electric Joint

"Too Low to Get High"
From the album *Time Undone*
Spaceflight Records

Austin, Texas-based Kalu and the Electric Joint blends the power of psychedelic soul music with the driving beat of rock and roll and the ancient rhythms of Africa. The group's new record, *Time Undone*, is a sonic masterpiece of original tunes with a positive message and soul-stirring beats.

kaluandtheelectricjoint.com

8 Velvet Caravan

"Margaret"
From the album *Style*
Josephine Records

Velvet Caravan is one of the most unusual ensembles, bringing together a motley crew of musicians. Combining gypsy, honky-tonk, swing and Latin, this band plays upbeat tunes from all over the world with thunderous virtuosity and relentless sense of humor.

velvetcaravan.com

9 Electric Orange Peel

"Inside Your Head"
From the album *Seed*
Self-Released

Electric Orange Peel is a group of four young musicians on a mission to bring the psychedelic roots of classic rock into the modern age of music. Replete with insane chops, outstanding improvisational chemistry and unforgettable songs… this is a once in a lifetime band you don't want to miss!

electricorangepeel.bandcamp.com

10 The Kind Thieves

"Shallow Grave"
From the album *Many a Thief*
Self-Released

Straight from the heart of Appalachia, The Kind Thieves bring a wide spectrum of genres together to form a seamless quilt of musical diversity. Blending Southern rock with bluegrass, country with funk, and folk with soul, they're able to navigate through familiar styles with a unique flavor.

facebook.com/kindthievesofficial

11 Star Dancer

"U.S. Blues"
From the album *Pachamama*
Star Dancer Records

Star Dancer is a one of a kind modern rock-and-roll project fusing spirituality, consciousness, shamanism, plant medicines, holistic healing and indigenous cultures together with some serious killer rock riffs and descriptive lyrics to help heal our earth.

stardancerband.com

12 Nick Gravelding

"Drives the Heart Away"
From the EP *Shack Sessions*
Big O Records

"Drives the Heart Away" is from the EP *Shack Sessions* — Benchmark Studios (eng. Chris Utley) Nashville — and was produced by Mike Shimshack. Nick Gravelding is a singer-songwriter from Central New York with deep Southern influences, with Nir Z on drums, Dan Dugmore on electric guitar and pedal steel, Jason Roller on acoustic guitar and fiddle, David Dorn on keys and Rob Cureton on bass.

thegraveldingbrothers.com

13 Editor's Pick: Khruangbin

"Maria También"
From the album *Con Todo El Mundo*
Dead Oceans

Influenced by the funk and soul sounds of the Middle East, globetrotting Texan trio Khruangbin present their second album *Con Todo El Mundo,* out January 2018. A vibe-synchronous soul-unit traveling the planet, absorbing the sights, sounds and feels, processing them through the Khruangbin filter and gifting the result… with all the world.

khruangbin.com

14 JamOFF Winner: Karl Dietel Five

"Don't Give Yourself Away"
From the album *Karl Dietel Five*
Self-Released

Karl Dietel Five plays urgent, melodic songs that draw from the years Dietel spent touring in The Samples, and their sound is a blend of experience and inspiration. Listen close, and you may find someone you know in their songs. Listen closer, and you realize that person may be you.

karldietelfive.com

Widespread Panic

Joey Waronker—that's become Waters' personal trademark. That is, if you must submit to anything, then let it be music that tells a meaningful story while it seduces you. ***Bill Murphy***

Widespread Panic

10/20/2017- Riverside Theater, Milwaukee, WI

LIVE WIDESPREAD PANIC

Widespread Panic's 2017 fall tour included three three-night runs: St. Augustine, Fla., Milwaukee and Las Vegas. And of those nine shows, the band picked the first night from Milwaukee for an extra-special release. Instead of making it available for download immediately, they sent the recording to **John Keane** for mastering, giving it an extra crispness, with the vocals, guitars and bass mixed crystal clear. The evening started off with the debut of Tom Petty's "You Wreck Me," a fitting tribute to the classic rocker who passed away suddenly earlier in the month. From there, they mixed newish Panic tunes throughout the night like "Old Neighborhood," "Bust It Big" and "Protein Drink" with some deeper cuts from the band's repertoire like "Mercy," the instrumental "B of D" and a gorgeous rendition of "Aunt Avis," a song that had been dormant for nearly a year. Along with the Petty cover, they also offered a ZZ Top double take, with "Waitin' for the Bus"> "Jesus Just Left Chicago." But the night's highlight came in the middle of the first set, when the band launched into an action-packed 20-plus minute segue-fest of "Machine"> "Barstools and Dreamers"> "Machine"> "Travelin' Light," with the "Barstools" featuring an overt nod to Sly and the Family Stone's "Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Agin)." **Jimmy Herring** drove the segment throughout, with numerous powerful guitar lines in between **John Bell** belting out soulful lines, one after another. This show isn't packed with Panic classics, but it is a great example of how, even though they've deliberately scaled back their touring, they can still show up after a month off and tear it up.

Mike Ayers

Tony Allen

The Source BLUE NOTE

Jazz, of course, had its origins in Africa and we often tend to think

of the music's journey as a one-way trip. It wasn't, and isn't now—for all of the inspiration Americans have drawn from African culture, musicians on the African continent have long found plenty from this side to push their own creative instincts in different directions. Nigerian drummer **Tony Allen** is best known as a key member of Fela Kuti's ensembles during the '60s and '70s. Allen was there at the dawn of Afrobeat music and was one of its architects, but even then, he was listening closely to American jazz, inspired by the likes of drummers Art Blakey and Max Roach. On *The Source*, Allen and 10 stellar musicians (heavy on the horns and keys) fuse Afrobeat with the hard-bop style that moved the now 77 year old when he was coming up. Each of the 11 tracks bears an Allen writing credit and most were co-composed by **Yann Jankielewicz**, one of the saxophonists on the set, and recorded on analog equipment in France. It's a steamy, danceable collection—all of it groove-centric, polyrhythms upon polyrhythms, stacked horns and fiery solos. Even at its most chill, as on "Woro Dance," there's a churning beat under the hood, something going on here, something else there and rarely a rest stop or traffic light in sight. "Cool Cats" recalls James Brown at his funkiest and, on "Bad Roads," Allen tricks out a rhythm that seems to defy time rather than conform to it.

Jeff Tamarkin

Wesley Hodges

Flamin' Groovies

Fantastic Plastic SONIC KICKS/SEVERN

Back in the heyday of the San Francisco ballrooms, while everyone

else was jamming the night away, **Flamin' Groovies** served as outliers, keeping their songs short, melodic and tied directly to the spirit of early rock-and-roll. In 1971, singer/guitarist **Chris Wilson** teamed with co-founders **Cyril Jordan** (who is also a guitarist and vocalist), bassist **George Alexander** and the other then-current members and began to push the band into a direction that overtly foreshadowed the power-pop movement that took root big time in the late '70s. *Fantastic Plastic* marks the reunion of Jordan and Wilson nearly four decades after the latter's departure from the band. Co-writing all of the album's originals together and tossing in a couple of choice covers (one each from The Beau Brummels and NRBQ), they're joined by a revolving crew of bassists (Alexander appears on much of it) and drummers and, wouldn't you know it, they sound just like they did when they were turning out gems like *Shake Some Action* and *Flamin' Groovies Now* way back when. Among the new material, "Crazy Macy," released earlier as a single, is a highlight, the kind of driving no-B.S. rocker you play once and then immediately need to play another half-dozen times. "What the Hell's Goin' On" takes on an added dollop of tough, in a Stones/Faces mold, while guitar-saturated mini-gems like "She Loves Me" and "Lonely Hearts" could easily have been lost '60s regional 45s that found their way to one of those post-*Nuggets* compilations of shoulda-been hits. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

Tommy "CGP" Emmanuel & David "Dawg" Grisman

Pickin' ACOUSTIC DISC

Pickin' is the kind of collaborative

effort that, on first listen, immediately prompts the question, "What took so long?" Both mandolin virtuoso **David Grisman** and the award-winning fingerpicking guitarist **Tommy "CGP" Emmanuel** ("CGP" stands for Certified Guitar Player) have been kicking around the acoustic music world for so long that it seems they would have thought of this idea decades ago. Well, better late than never for sure, and this is a gem from note one on out. On a set of tunes composed by Grisman, save for two standards ("Sweet Georgia Brown" and "Waltzing Matilda," the latter with an Emmanuel arrangement), the pair connects intuitively—theirs is a single-minded approach that those who've worked together for years would envy. It's there in the set-launching "Zorro's Last Ride," a Django-esque romp that allows both players to strut a bit while never straying from each other's orbit, in the hushed, easygoing ballads ("Dawg's Waltz," "Cinderella's Fella") and in the quick-picked, intricate "Farm & Fun Time." Most of *Pickin'* is taken at a relatively easy pace, leaving plenty of breathing room—at this point in their careers, both musicians have proven that they can break the speed of light, and this isn't about that. Instead, *Pickin'* serves as a good-natured, front-porch-style meetup between two pros who want nothing more than to have a good old time doing what they do best.

Jeff Tamarkin

Calexico

The Thread That Keeps Us ANTI-

For more than 20 years now,

Calexico has owned the desert-rock landscape with a subtle combination of Arthur Lee and Love-esque psychedelia meets mariachi meets country-rock. That sound has made for a robust catalog, one that's been vastly underrated as far as their alt-country peers go. On the band's ninth album, *The Thread That Keeps Us*, they expand their musical palette a bit more with some notable funky moments, along with some harsher electric tones too. Perhaps one of the things that contributed to this slight departure is that they recorded at Panoramic House, a studio they called "The Phantom Ship," just north of San Francisco in Stinson Beach, a favorite hippy-haunt of Jerry Garcia and the Grateful Dead. You can hear the weirdness run through songs like the organ-and-horn tinged "Another Space," where **Joey Burns** repeats "In another time, in another space in another way, we'll get back to this place" over and over—something of a rare moment of repetition. And the swampy funk-driven "Flores Y Tamales," sung in Spanish, is another standout moment where they get into a weird, untraditional groove. But Calexico is best when they're doing their Calexico thing, on poignant ballads like "Girl in the Forest" and the groovy "Under the Wheels," where Burns croons about today's politically destructive mood, singing about war machines and the world falling apart. It's moody, sure, but as the album title suggests, the sonic threads keeping Calexico together are here. They're just a little looser now, with songs feeling a bit more immediate this time.

Mike Ayers

Mike Stern

Trip HEADS UP

You have to know the backstory to

understand where **Mike Stern** is coming from here. While waiting for a cab in New York City he tripped—literally, on some construction debris—and broke both arms. It took a couple of surgeries and a good amount of time before he was able to play guitar again—and, even then, he had to do so seated, his hand taped to the pick. Now that you know all that, the next important thing to consider is that you'd never guess he'd been through such hell if no one had told you. The music on *Trip* is as fluid and exhilarating as any that Stern has made before. Working with a large cast of core accompanists and guest players, Stern rips, soothes, cajoles and teases as required—his playing is never less than on-point, stripped of excess and cliché. The opening title track is classic fusion, an exercise in how to display virtuosity without being obnoxious about it. **Bob Franceschini**'s tenor saxophone solo is muscular and funked-up, and the rhythm section of **Victor Wooten** on bass and **Dennis Chambers** on drums burns hot. "Scotch Tape and Glue" (what Stern used to keep the pick in place) brings in drummer **Lenny White** and saxophonist **Bill Evans** to keep things swinging

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Reviews

and, on the ballad "Gone," Stern hauls out the acoustic, engaging in empathic interplay with **Jim Beard**, who's superb on piano throughout the recording while doubling as producer. *Jeff Tamarkin*

Dhani Harrison

IN///PARALLEL BMG

Dhani Harrison has been kicking around the music scene his entire life—he's paid his dues in bands and in other collaborations, he has friends in high places and he's got plenty of talent. He waited years to put his own name on an album and, now that it's here, he wants to be recognized for what he's done, not who he is. But it'd be ridiculous not to at least mention that Dhani is the son of George and Olivia Harrison, and you're forgiven if you approach this debut looking for comparisons. So let's get that out of the way: Dhani Harrison has a slight vocal resemblance to his dad, but not so much that you'd notice it if no one pointed it out in advance. So, what about *IN///PARALLEL*, then? It's a determinedly contemporary recording of songs that are alternately personal and reflective in nature ("Never Know"), cast a light on political and social issues ("Summertime Police"), or skirt the mystical. (Hey, the genes are the genes.) Effects-heavy and drenched in electronics and plodding beats, much of *IN///PARALLEL* goes out of its way to avoid the more traditional classic-rock sound of the older friends Harrison thanks in the credits. Although a few tunes, notably the final two, "All About Waiting" and "Admiral of Upside Down," step away from the machines long enough to make clear that there are songs somewhere in there dying to be heard. *Jeff Tamarkin*

Kllo

Backwater GHOSTLY INTERNATIONAL

There's a prominent techno backbone to this Melbourne duo's full-length debut, but it's a far sight beyond the usual four-on-the-floor beats and whistly synthesizers. Folding in tastes of dreampop, trip-hop, dub and old-school chillout, *Backwater* maps out a sonic journey that's as inward-looking as it is club-ready. At the center of it all is **Chloe Kaul**'s breathy tenor; she has a natural timbre that's perfectly suited to modern R&B, but without the excessive melismatic runs (thanks Mariah!). Think of more eclectic neo-soul singers like Amel Larrieux or even Little Dragon's Yukimi Nagano, and you get the picture. "Last Yearn," a bouncy trance groove driven by a simple clap track and a lone Rhodes-like synth, showcases how Kaul can make herself an indispensable part of a song; she crafts vocal melody after melody seemingly on the spot, all with a daunting breadth of emotion that never turns maudlin. And here, of course, it's worth mentioning the production talents of **Simon Lam**, the duo's other half, who layers soundscapes and beats with stark precision, without losing the human warmth behind the programming. **Kllo** has antecedents in the work of fellow Australians like Sia and Kylie Minogue, but they've held tight to an aura of experimentation and

OFF THE TRACKS

Underhill Rose

The Great Tomorrow

SELF-RELEASED

The third album from trio **Underhill Rose**, 2015's *The Great Tomorrow*, certainly points toward a bright future for **Molly Rose**, **Eleanor Underhill** and **Salley Williamson**, extending their catalog of heartfelt songs bolstered by thoughtful lyrics delivered with expertly entwined harmonies. After their sophomore effort, 2013's crowdfunded *Something Real*, made its way into the Americana Music Association's Top 40 for 10 weeks, the trio returned to their fans to help make *The Great Tomorrow* and paid them back with 11 tracks that range from playful to poignant, and display the growing songwriting talent of the group's three women, all of whom penned at least two of the album's songs. Produced by The Black Lillies' **Cruz Contreras**, *The Great Tomorrow* was recorded in Asheville, N.C., and seems to have absorbed the beautiful surroundings into its compositions, which feature guest musicians like Steep Canyon Rangers' **Nicky Sanders** and **Mike Ashworth**, Jeff Sipe Trio's **Mike Seal,** and **Matt Smith** of the Honeycutters. The collection is bookended by diverse but connected ideas: The first two tracks "Our Time is Done" and "When I Die" speak to the inevitability of life, while closing cuts "Not Gonna Worry" and the title track invoke the sentiment of living that life to its fullest. "Whispering Pines Motel," one of the album's standouts, offers a slinky ode to a consuming love that highlights Underhill Rose's instrumental chemistry, and "Straight Up," the band's take on Paula Abdul's late-'80s hit, turns the pop number into a swaggering country jaunt, proving that these three can make a tune their own as well as they can craft a new one. *Matt Inman*

adventure by stripping the blueprint down to its indie basics.
Bill Murphy

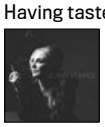
Brian Blade & the Fellowship Band

Body and Shadow BLUE NOTE

Besides being one of the most celebrated, in-demand drummers in jazz, **Brian Blade** has always lived what almost seems, at times, to be another life, serving as sideman for the likes of Norah Jones, Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell and Iron & Wine. He's also applied much of his creative impulse to helming his **Fellowship Band**, which has now released its fifth album in some two decades. It's not as if he has a lot of time on his hands. Now a sextet, with co-founders **Jon Cowherd** (piano), **Chris Thomas** (bass), **Myron Walden** (alto saxophone, bass clarinet) and **Melvin Butler** (tenor saxophone) joined by new guitarist **Dave Devine**, what strikes initially about the Fellowship Band here, as before, is how uninterested Blade is in using his namesake outfit as a vehicle for flaunting his considerable jazz-drumming skills. Perhaps he just figures that there are plenty of other places for listeners to marvel at his chops. Instead, this band is all about composition, and it so happens that most of the compositions that he and Cowherd turn out lean toward the easy-going side with a tilt toward pop. While, on a track like the eight-minute-plus "Duality" Blade does turn up the beat (and the heat) in spots, more often than not, the drums are non-existent or minimal, allowing Walden to step up and blow fiercely and for Cowherd to explore outside of the melody. The elegiac two-part "Have Thine Own Way, Lord" and other highlight tracks, including the opening "Within Everything," closer "Broken Leg Days" and the three sections of the title track ("Morning," "Noon" and "Night"), fashion chill atmospherics and sultry moods.
Jeff Tamarkin

Lee Ann Womack

The Lonely, The Lonesome & The Gone ATO



Having tasted pop crossover stardom for almost two decades, **Lee Ann Womack** has slowly found her way back to the East Texas country roots that made her a star in the first place. *The Lonely, The Lonesome & The Gone* picks up in black-and-white, where 2014's full-color *The Way I'm Livin'* left off, with a dark, shadowy edge to the opening "All the Trouble" and the trad-acoustic "End of the End of the World"—a wry ballad written by Nashville mainstay and guitarist **Adam Wright**, whose contributions throughout keep the music grounded in a bluesy psychedelic netherworld akin in sound and atmospherics to recent outings like Doyle Bramhall II's *Rich Man* or Jack White's *Lazaretto*. "Wicked" is a prime example; Womack channels a soulful, smoky attitude that recalls Petula Clark or a young Dolly Parton, while Wright rips a Mississippi Delta-worthy solo dripping with existential dread. Top to bottom, *The Lonely* is a startling triumph for Womack; she can communicate a profound sense of vulnerability on "Shine on Rainy Day," or she can outright *own* the feeling of cursed resignation behind the classic "Long Black Veil," a song from 1959, and later made famous by Johnny Cash, that has most frequently been sung from the point of view of a man doomed to hang. Womack's version is stark, chilling and ultimately inspiring—the sound of a uniquely gifted singer-songwriter at the absolute peak of her powers.
Bill Murphy

Strange Machines

Voice of Color SELF-RELEASED

The Boston music scene has always been an incubator for young jambands, and the city's latest crop includes improv-rock outfit **Strange Machines**. Fostered for the last six years by their "Strange fam" following, the band's first full-length *Voice of Color* is yet another step in the right direction for the four-piece, who have recently made strides opening for acts like Twiddle and Turkuaz. Founding member and lead guitarist **Mike MacDonald** is the real all-star on this record, laying down an impressive solo at the end of the nearly 10-minute "Golden Rule." His virtuosity is worth a second (and third) listen. However, that doesn't mean that *Voice of Color* is without its shortcomings. At times, the vocals are a little too front-facing in the mix and, clocking in at 75 minutes, it could have been tightened up to amplify standouts like the title track, "The In-Between" and "Squid." With multiple songs surpassing the nine-minute mark, it's clear that these guys love their extended compositions, and they definitely flourish rather than flounder under all that sheet music. Genres vary from reggae to funk to straight-up rock, but the free-form moments are always there, ready to take off. Honorable mention goes to jack-of-all trades keyboardist **Christian Perron**, who somehow fits in jamtronica synths and Page McConnell-esque piano solos within the same LP. All things considered, in a city that births new bands every day, Strange Machines have carved out a lane for themselves in Beantown and beyond.
Raffaela Kenny-Cincotta

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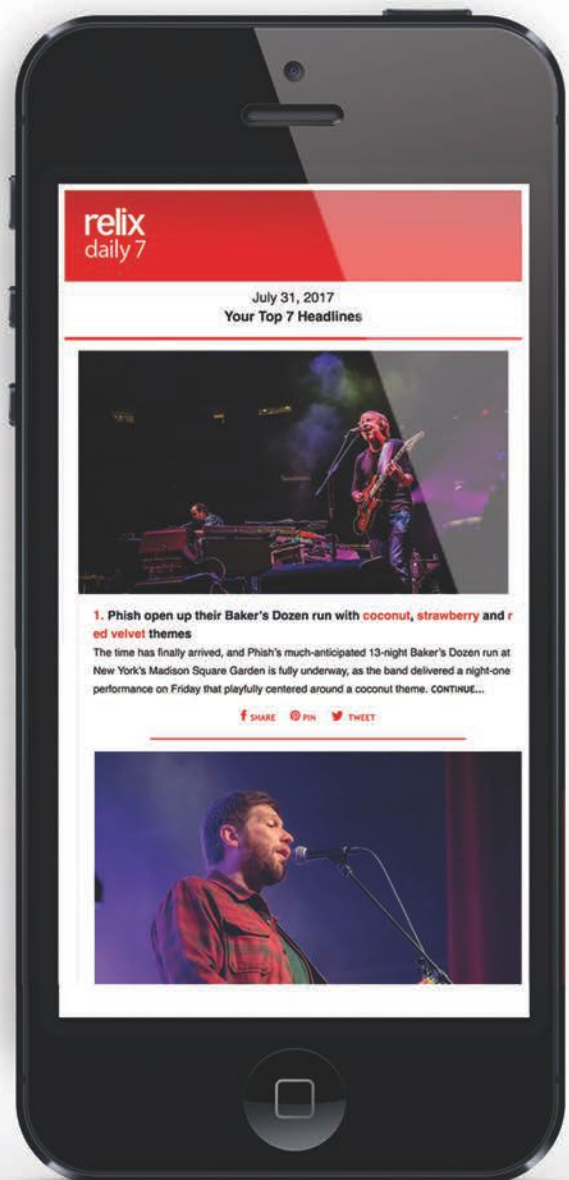
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Your Top 7 Headlines
1. Phish open up their Baker's Dozen run with coconut, strawberry and red velvet themes
The time has finally arrived, and Phish's much-anticipated 13-night Baker's Dozen run at New York's Madison Square Garden is fully underway, as the band delivered a night-one performance on Friday that playfully centered around a coconut theme. CONTINUE...
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Reviews

Sharon Jones & The Dap-Kings
Soul of a Woman DAPTONE

The James Hunter Six
Whatever It Takes DAPTONE

Michael Rault
It's a New Day Tonight
DAPTONE/WICK

In the not so distant future, the Daptone label will surely come up in the same conversations as Stax, Chess, King and Motown–imprints that changed the world's perception not only of what soul music can be, but also the love and unity it can inspire in people. **Sharon Jones**, the free-spirited matriarch of the Daptone family (and it is a family) will always be at the heart of that legacy, so it's only fitting that, on her last recording with **The Dap-Kings**, she goes out on a high note.

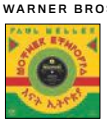
Not that she would have had it any other way. Jones was open about everything in her life–including her battle with cancer, as the poignant and revealing documentary *Miss Sharon Jones!* made clear. *Soul of a Woman* is a fitting close to that narrative. There's a life-affirming thread that connects all these songs, from the funky breaks of "Sail On!" and the dreamy colors of "Come and Be a Winner" to the sweet, orchestral balladry of "When I Saw Your Face." Throughout, Jones shows off her incredible range; she sets "Matter of Time" alight with her signature fire, while she draws strength from pain on the album's emotional closer "Call on God." And as usual, the dependable Dap-Kings are right there with her, moving and grooving with a collective grit that will no doubt fuel them in the years to come.

Meanwhile, the Daptone story rolls on. On his second album for the label and his third with Dap-Kings producer and bassist **Gabriel Roth** (a.k.a Bosco Mann), veteran Brit soul singer **James Hunter** channels a genuine flair for old school–Sam Cooke in particular–while lending his voice a grizzled edge on songs like the hyped-up "I Got Eyes," the hard-swinging "Don't Let Pride Take You for a Ride" and the jazzy, jump blues-flavored "How Long." With the 1960s soul scene having long exerted a profound influence on Roth and his fellow Dap-Kings, it was only a matter of time before Hunter and Roth joined forces. Now three albums in, the partnership is reaping rich rewards.

Further out on the Daptone orbit is Canada's **Michael Rault**, whose debut with the label's Wick imprint, founded in 2015, mines psychedelic-rock and art-pop, finding a comfortable space between late-era Beatles (George Harrison for sure) and XTC. (He also nods to 1970s outfits like ELO and Wings). At times, he flirts with sounding a bit *too* derivative, but cuts like the acoustic guitar-driven "Sitting Still," with its pastoral textures and tightly compressed backbeat (courtesy of drummer **Mikey Post**), capture his freewheeling originality. *It's A New Day Tonight* might be a bit of an odd entry in the Daptone catalog–but then, a label can never move from catalog to canon without the desire to push the ever-present envelope to its unknown extremes. Sharon Jones certainly proved that with every note she sang.

Bill Murphy

Paul Weller
Mother Ethiopia [EP]
WARNER BROS./PARLOPHONE



When you've been in the game as long as **Paul Weller**, you're entitled to go off on the occasional tangent. After months of diligent work on *A Kind Revolution*–his 13th solo album released earlier this year, a lush, sprawling ode to rock and soul, with guest appearances from Robert Wyatt and Boy George–Weller shifted gears to produce the veteran blue-eyed Brit soul band **Stone Foundation**, whose *Street Rituals* is a killer statement in its own right. That, in turn, led to this oddball EP, exploring the Modfather's well-documented love of Ethiopian music and, in particular, the French record label Buda Musique's *Éthiopiques* series. Although Weller himself doesn't sing on these three versions of the loping instrumental "Mother Ethiopia," tracked by the Stone Foundation, what comes through immediately is his distinctive production stroke–clean, unadorned, seamlessly mixed and loyal to the old-school style of playing live from the floor, with few overdubs. The standout is Part 3's "No Tribe

No Colour," which features the three-piece **Krar Collective**, a London-based Ethiopian band with lead singer **Genet Assefa** emoting in her native Amharic. It's not vintage Weller by any stretch, but if it's a sign of where his next album (supposedly already in the can) might be heading, then the old-dog-new-tricks paradigm is in for a profound shake-up. ***Bill Murphy***

Sunwatchers

II TROUBLE IN MIND

Birthed from the always-roiling Northeastern avant-weirdo jazz-punk scene, **Sunwatchers**' second proper full-length plays like a document of a band in progress–the current progress status being *fire*. Beginning at full bliss, the quartet squonks, squeals and blazes through more than 40 minutes of free-range jams for serious music heads, sometimes in all-forward attack mode; other times, opening up into more contemplative spaces. The music shreds and grooves simultaneously ("Silent Boogie"), shoots into clouds ("The Works") and floats in meditative collectivity ("Flowers of the Water (For Lou)"), sewn together by non-Western scales, hallucinatory repetition and chaos. With capably skronking saxophonist **Jeff Tobias** piercing the density of the swirl, the band anchors itself firmly in the lineage of revelatory cosmic jazz of Albert Ayler and Sun Ra, but finds a model in the DIY ethno-jazz heroes, Sun City Girls, albeit with fewer inclinations toward sudden confrontation and/or audience-alienating musical self-immolation. With visions of solidarity via noise à la MC5's Trans-Love Energies, *II* arrives with a manifesto, and why not? Things are breaking up out there. But the album is a manifesto of its own, with or without the explanatory text, carrying a sense of history and musical mission so strong and noisy that it would be all but impossible to miss the message, etched in musical flames and unmistakable in these bogus times. More significantly, *II* is more than a manifesto, but an irreducible wail of sound with its own nuances, emitting love. ***Jesse Jarnow***

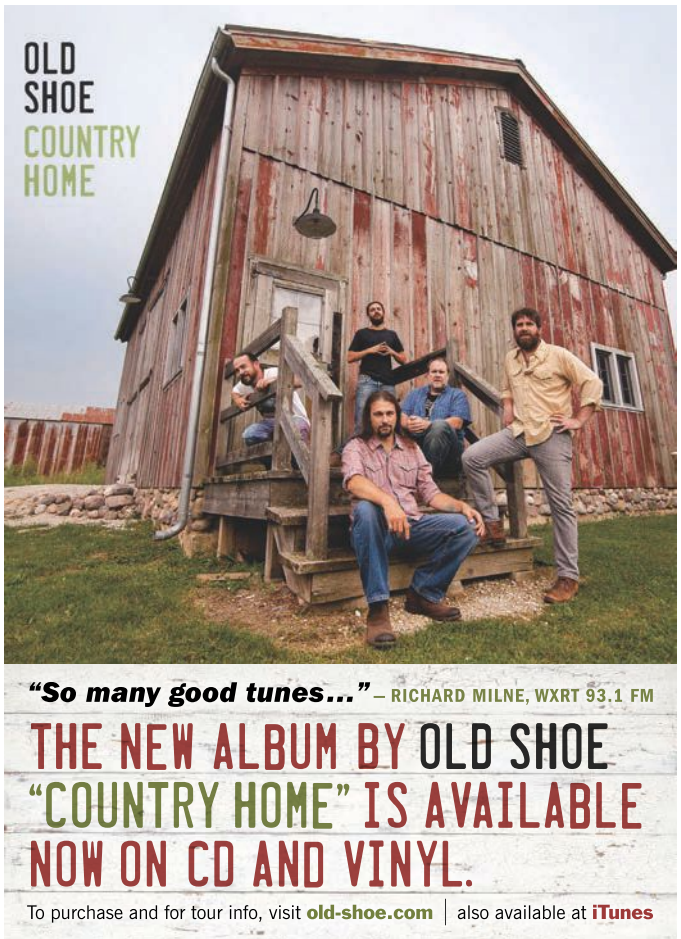
Bootsy Collins

World Wide Funk MASCOT

Trends come and go, but **William "Bootsy" Collins** ever remains on "The One," or somewhat more colloquially, "on the good foot," as James Brown might have put it back in 1969 when he hired young Bootsy and his brother **Phelps "Catfish" Collins** to hold down the bass and guitar gigs in the original JB's. Since then, from his '70s heyday as one of the driving (and surviving) forces behind Parliament-Funkadelic, through his various supergroups and solo projects, Bootsy has kept the funk flame burning, always with his distinctly upbeat and star-toonish persona intact.

Bootsy Collins

World Wide Funk doesn't break much in terms of new musical ground–but then again, it doesn't have to. "I'm a put it on your body like cheese on grits," sings **Musiq Soulchild** on "Hot Saucer," an infectious disco-funk workout that signifies the prevailing MO (let's call it the *moodus* operandi): Just have yourself some fun, and never forget that cheese can be quite tasty. It's the main ingredient in "Ladies Nite," which also reminds us, thanks to guest raps by **MC Eiht** and Cincinnati's **Blvck Seeds**, how the P-Funk sound transformed modern hip-hop. Things get a little spicier on "Bass-Rigged System," a bass conference with **Victor Wooten**, **Stanley Clarke**, **Manou Gallo** and up-and-comer **Alissia Benveniste**, and on the title track, where longtime cohort and guitar-slinger **Buckethead** steps out in full shred. Strangely, there aren't any real Bootsy-style bedroom ballads to speak of (cue up 1977's "Munchies for Your Love" for a classic taste, if you dare), although a big-hearted Bernie Worrell tribute ("A Salute to Bernie," with the man himself channeling Jimi Hendrix's "Bold as Love") and a lively closer with **Chuck D** and Buckethead ("Illusions") more than make up for the absence. ***Bill Murphy***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Reviews

PLUNDERING THE VAULTS

Widespread Panic
Live From Austin, TX NEW WEST

Widespread Panic's Halloween shows are always a celebratory affair, but this gig from 2000 was cause for a different type of party–the band's first taping of the famed TV series *Austin City Limits*. This show was originally released on DVD in 2008, and is now available on vinyl.

At the time, the band was a year into the release of 1999's *'Til the Medicine Takes*, and the setlist is a mix of standout tracks from that album, alongside Panic classics that never get old. They opened the night appropriately with "Let's Get Down to Business," a Vic Chesnutt cut from their collaborative *brute.* album, followed by quick versions of "Ain't Life Grand" and "Space Wrangler." From there, things were kept tight and compact on songs like "Climb to Safety," "Blue Indian" and "Casa Del Grillo." Because of the nature of taping a TV show, there wasn't too much time for improv, but they more than made up for it on the 18 minute "Driving Song" / "Surprise Valley" / "Driving Song" combo. This 1-2-3 punch takes up an entire side of a record and finds late guitarist **Michael Houser** leading the charge, as he did often at the time.

Live From Austin, TX isn't essential live Panic. Unlike their other Halloween shows, the cover song bustouts are nonexistent. But if you're a vinyl junkie, this is the only thing available that showcases the band's electric live set on an LP, a fruitful era when they were riding high behind several excellent studio albums and a growing fanbase.

Mike Ayers

Various Artists
At the Louisiana Hayride Tonight
BEAR FAMILY

If you lived in the South between April 3, 1948 and Aug. 27, 1960, then there was a strong chance you spent your Saturday nights listening to the *Louisiana Hayride*, broadcast by KWKH-AM out of Shreveport in the city's historic Municipal Auditorium. Just about anyone who was anyone in country, bluegrass and rockabilly during this time appeared on the *Hayride*, from established royalty in the genre like the **Louvin Brothers**, **Roy Acuff** and **Hank Williams** to then up-and-coming national stars like **George Jones**, **Johnny Cash**, his future wife **June Carter** and **Elvis Presley** to obscure regional acts like **Doug & Rusty Kershaw** and **Johnny Mathis**. The house band, meanwhile, was flanked by session legends such as guitarist **James Burton**, pianist **Floyd Cramer** and longtime Elvis sideman **DJ Fontana** on the drums. This mindblowing 20-disc box set from Bear Family has it all. But what makes *At the Louisiana Hayride Tonight* so special is the litany of stage banter, live commercial reads and transcribed skits that exist between the performances from the 167 acts presented here. It's like opening up a portal into another time completely, especially when you immerse yourself in this boxed experience by listening to it in sequence (and digging into the extremely insightful coffee-table-size book that accompanies the discs). These 25 hours of audio are not only essential listening for earnest fans of American roots music, but also for students of our country's history in the mid-20th century. ***Ron Hart***

Sister Rosetta Tharpe
Live in 1960 ORG MUSIC

When **Sister Rosetta Tharpe**'s name was recently announced as a first-time nominee for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, reactions went two ways: "Who?" and "It's about damn time." To answer the first question, Sister Rosetta Tharpe (1915-73) was a gospel singer who achieved considerable fame by singing her heart out and playing some mean-ass electric guitar at a time when women–especially gospel-singing women–just didn't do that sort of thing. To respond to the second point, Tharpe should have been inducted as an early influence way back in the Hall's infancy. Her impact on blues, R&B and rock artists–among them Aretha Franklin, Elvis Presley, Bob Dylan, Johnny Cash and Tina Turner–has been firmly documented. This 1960 set, released on vinyl for the first time, is Exhibit A. From the first notes of "Can't Sit Down," Tharpe is rocking like mad, her vocal delivery throwing direct lines to Little Richard and her guitar to Chuck Berry (two others she influenced). Whether singing primal blues with minimal backing ("Can't No Grave Hold My Body Down," "Peace in the Valley"), a rousing, uptempo, guitar-heavy number ("Down by the Riverside," "Didn't It Rain") or another variation on her particular mojo, Tharpe was thoroughly captivating. The fidelity

of this vintage live recording is, of course, not up to contemporary standards, but her charisma and sheer brilliance ring out in every note. *Jeff Tamarkin*

Phish

A Live One 4-LP Vinyl Box Set JEMP

There once was a time when **Phish** live gigs weren't divvied out 30 minutes after the show via the band and a streaming app. In 1995, the group released their first-ever live album on compact disc and cassette, aptly titled *A Live One*–and it was an instant must-have for any fan. Now, 22 years later, it's gotten a rerelease on vinyl in what feels like a larger-than-life 4-LP box set. Like a lot of box sets the band has done over the years–think *Hampton Comes Alive* or *Ventura*–they took some extra care in the presentation, notably with a book-size insert that shows the band backstage during the '94 tours when it was recorded, and the vinyl itself is divided into red and blue. Watching it turn around a record player can be mesmerizing. A great thing about *A Live One* is, from start to finish, it runs like a great show. There's short, punchy songs like "Bouncing Around the Room," "Gumbo," featuring **The Giant Country Horns**, and an early five-minute version of "Simple." There's randomness with "Montana," and epic crescendos with "Harry Hood." And there are powerful, monster jams in "You Enjoy Myself" and a 30-minute "Tweezer," where one finds the band super dark at one moment and super playful at others.

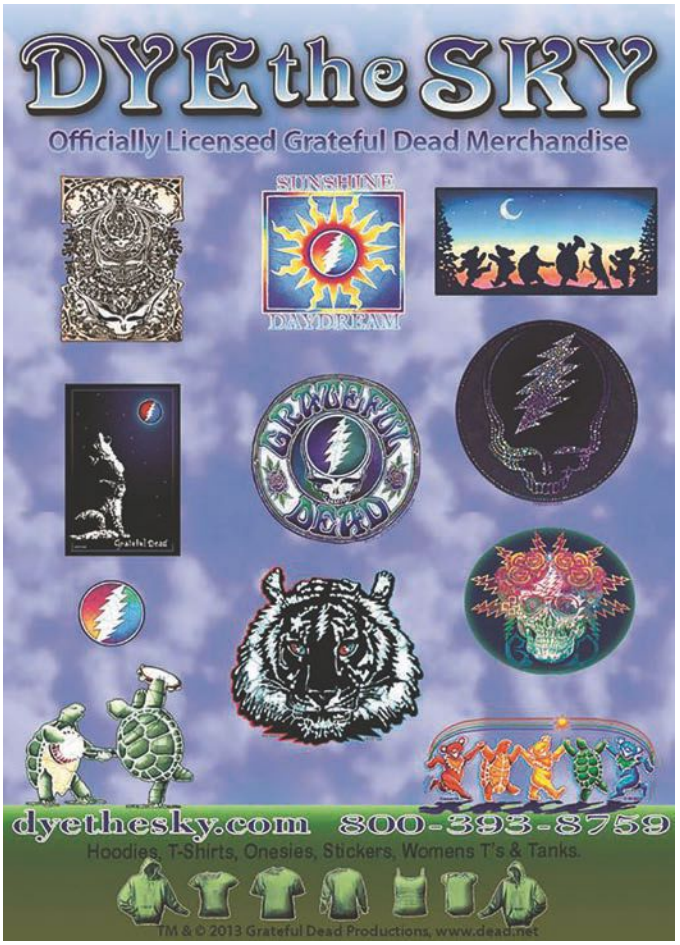
But that "Tweezer" does present one big problem with the vinyl format–the song is split over two records, so you have to turn over the wax to finish it out. Not ideal, but it's reminiscent of a time when your tapes flipped from Side A to Side B–and the days when epic jams had to be spread out, like it or not. Nostalgia at its finest. *Mike Ayers*

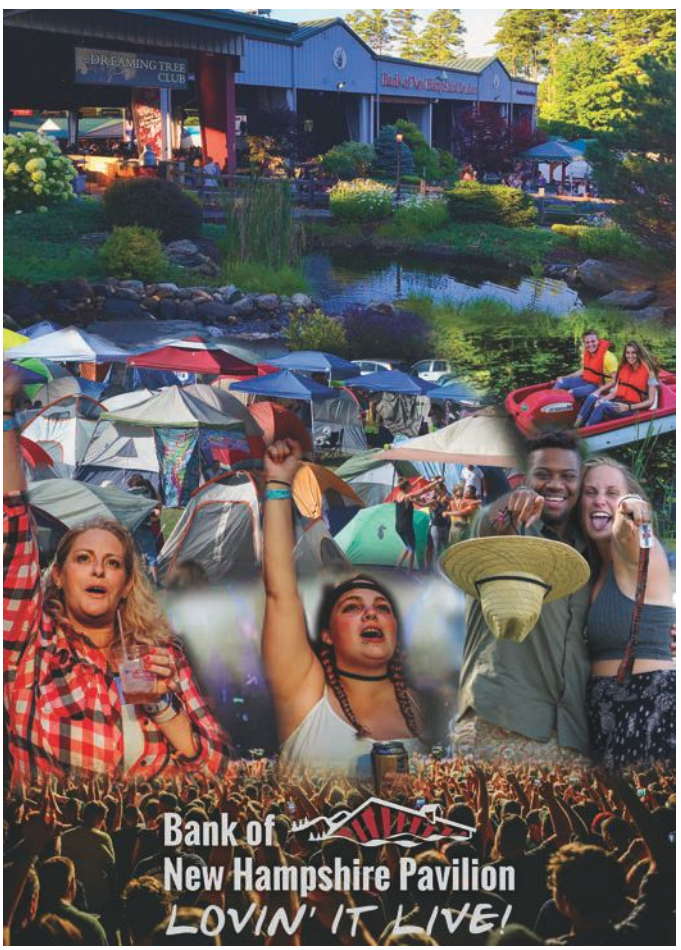
Atlantic Bridge

Atlantic Bridge: Remastered & Expanded Edition ESOTERIC

Before the great jazz-rock boom of the early 1970s, this British quartet pioneered the art of funneling a pop song through a fusion arrangement. That's not to say that they *perfected* that art. Numerous stretches of their lone, self-titled LP fall prey to the sort of snoozy wallpaper vamping that ran the genre into irrelevancy later in the decade. The worst offender is the refresh

Sister Rosetta Tharpe





of The Beatles' "Dear Prudence": The band guts that mystical tune down to its signature descending chord progression, rendered here by **Mike McNaught**'s electric piano; from there, it's a parade of bland, if instrumentally competent, soloing. (In this case, the cover song vehicle was a trap—when you're forced to live up to a Beatles song, you may have set your sights too high.) But there's a reason that vinyl hounds continue to scour for this sought-after period-piece: These guys can wail, and when their enthusiasm matches their skill level, the results remain stunning. Opener "MacArthur Park" reimagines Jimmy Webb's 1968 schmaltz-pop hit (originally recorded by Richard Harris) into a proggy inferno anchored by **Daryl Runswick**'s fuzz-bass and **Jim Philip**'s assorted flutes and saxes. Here, as with their take on Webb's "Rosecrans Boulevard," they drain any traces of mawkish sentiment in favor of harmonic fire. Esoteric's remastered edition expands the band's story with a pair of bonus tracks, including a dopey attempt at radio play ("I Can't Lie to You") fronted by a blustery female soul singer. Not a good look, but, in spite of its lapses in both energy and judgement, **Atlantic Bridge** is still worth traversing. *Ryan Reed*

Grateful Dead

Long Strange Trip: Motion Picture Soundtrack RHINO

From the first seconds of **Amir Bar-Lev**'s extraordinary documentary *Long Strange Trip*, the viewer is reminded of the vast breadth of music created by the **Grateful Dead** over their three-decade run. The first tune heard, "Death Don't Have No Mercy," recorded at the Fillmore West in San Francisco in February 1969, and issued on side four of the *Live/Dead* album later that year, may not be the first tune you'd think of when considering the Dead. But hearing it again, in this context, one is struck by just how perfectly it encapsulates their genius: Alternately tender and brash, this simple blues showcases the singularity of **Jerry Garcia**'s guitar and vocal work, and the intuitiveness and dynamism of the group as a whole. Throughout this two-disc set—three if you purchase it through Amazon (it's also available in digital, with LPs to follow)—on both familiar studio recordings ("Uncle John's Band," "Touch of Grey"), canonic live performances (several tracks from the recently issued Cornell '77, the 2/14/70 ultimate "Dark Star") and a handful of previously unreleased surprises ("China Cat Sunflower/I Know You Rider," from France 1971; a tasty "The Music Never Stopped" from '75), those reminders arrive over and over. It's not that you don't know already—with thousands of hours official and non-official to access—that the Dead were capable of going to so many different places so naturally. But grooving along to what could be anyone's random playlist—an acoustic "Dark Hollow" leads to a stellar "Stella Blue" and that Nassau Coliseum "Althea" is as special as Al Franken insists in the film—substantiates one of the most salient points of *Long Strange Trip*. Whatever flaws there were, there is a bottomless well of joyous, uplifting pleasure and treasure in what these musicians left behind. *Jeff Tamarkin*

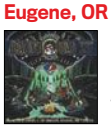
Bodast

Towards Utopia: Remastered Edition ESOTERIC

Steve Howe joined Yes in 1970, just in time to reinvent progressive rock on the band's third LP, *The Yes Album*. Ever since, his guitar work—a blend of Wes Montgomery jazz finesse, Chet Atkins country pickin', and supercharged psychedelia—has been the band's defining instrumental element. And if Steve Howe *is* Yes, then here's technically a long-lost Yes album: his 1969 recordings with short-lived, ill-fated act **Bodast**. The quartet—also featuring drummer **Bobby Clarke**, bassist **Dave Curtis** and frontman **Clive Skinner**—remain one of rock's true tragedies, disintegrating shortly after their sessions with producer **Keith West**. *Towards Utopia*, Esoteric's remastered compilation, showcases a band at the crux of the fading psych movement and the burgeoning prog-rock scene, with Howe's instrumental heroics edging the songs toward the latter camp. The plainest proof is "Nether Street," a guitar workout that later formed the foundation of "Würm," the final section of the Yes epic "Starship Trooper." (For Yes fans, it's a trip hearing "Nether Street" open with that triumphantly strummed acoustic guitar climax—it's like watching a sex scene played in reverse.) There are other glimpses of what Bodast could've become: "Mr. Jones" sounds like a lost mid-period Beatles tune with a virtuoso guitarist on deck; "Do You Remember" is a disorienting hybrid of proto-prog, proto-punk and country-rock. There's a fascinating friction between Skinner's pop-molded voice and Howe's violent guitar eruptions, and it's a shame that Bodast didn't survive long enough to refine that formula. But in retrospect, we can appreciate the band on their own merits—as a pivotal launching pad for one of prog's signature talents. *Ryan Reed*

Grateful Dead

Dave's Picks Volume 23: McArthur Court, U. of Oregon, Eugene, OR - 1/22/78 RHINO



Eugene, Ore., was always **Dead**-friendly turf—the several occasions they'd played the city or the region before always ranged from memorable to stellar (Springfield Creamery 1972 is a contender for top 10 best shows ever) and there was no reason to think that this one would be any different. Although, by January 1978, the **Godchaux**-era of the band was beginning to wind down—the degradation was apparent and, a year later, they'd be out. (The group as a whole had long since found its way with that particular setup and the possibility of transcendence was never far away.) In the set's liner notes, *Relix* contributing Editor **Jesse Jarnow** claims that the show first kicks into high gear midway through the first set in "Tennessee Jed," but that discounts the roaring first track "New Minglewood Blues" and a particularly snappy "El Paso" four songs later. As is quite often the case though, the real fireworks arrive after the break, with a pyrotechnic "Bertha"> "Good Lovin'" and a particularly sweet "Ship of Fools." The night, in many ways, belonged to **Bob Weir**, and his emphatic vocal delivery on "Samson and Delilah" brings out his most rock-star-esque showmanship tendencies, pushing the others to add fuel to the fire he's lit. The "Terrapin Station" suite that brings up the rear, encompassing an explosive "The Other One" and a triumphant "St. Stephen"> "Not Fade Away"> "Around and Around," and the always-rousing "U.S. Blues" encore, must've left the Oregonians breathless. The year ahead would find the Grateful Dead entering yet another transitional phase—plenty of ups, some serious downs—but this show (in fine-sounding Betty-Board quality) was one of the keepers. *Jeff Tamarkin*

The Flock

Truth - The Columbia Recordings 1969 -1970 ESOTERIC

For every pioneering jazz-rock band (Chicago, Blood Sweat & Tears) in the late '60s and early '70s, there were 10 generic groups exploring that same brassy style. **The Flock** fell somewhere between those two camps: Led by virtuoso violinist **Jerry Goodman**, a future member of the genre-bending Mahavishnu Orchestra, the band flaunted a heavier, wilder fusion influence than most of their contemporaries, though they were tempted by a melodic accessibility that, say, Soft Machine, would have balked at. The Flock massaged that sweet spot on their self-titled 1969 debut: With its eerie guitar and violin

The Beach Boys

harmonies and its saxophone blasts, "Clown" sounds like King Crimson covering Chicago's "25 or 6 to 4" and, between its dizzying violin runs, "I Am the Tall Tree" hovers in a hazy atmosphere of West Coast psychedelia that recalls the Grateful Dead or It's a Beautiful Day. Esoteric's remastered two-disc reissue also includes the band's second LP, 1970's *Dinosaur Swamps*—but they could have just stuck with the one. The follow-up has sporadic bursts of brilliance, like the country-psych-jazz barnburner "Big Bird," but most of the tracks fall prey to dated blues riffs ("Lighthouse," "Crabfoot," "Uranian Sircus") and cornball low-grade musical theater vocal tricks ("Hornschmeyer's Island"). Hardcore fans might enjoy perusing a handful of rare studio outtakes: Guitarist **Fred Glickstein** dominates the free-form fusion jam "Atlantians Truckin' Home" with a wonky guitar solo that echoes peak Frank Zappa, and **Ron Karpman**'s swinging drum groove highlights the meandering "Just Do It." The jazz-rock trend fizzled out because too many bands were sharing too few ideas but, for a very brief moment, The Flock teases their own singular path forward. ***Ryan Reed***

The Beach Boys

1967: Sunshine Tomorrow

CAPITOL/UME/BROTHER

The story of **Brian Wilson**'s failure to complete the Beach Boys' *SMiLE* album in 1967 is one of the most oft-told and tragic of '60s rock lore. However, the general consensus that Wilson's partial withdrawal from the group's creative process after his retreat resulted in mediocre Beach Boys music is one of rock's longest-standing loads of hooey. As this newly compiled double-disc compendium makes clear, the music that comprised the eccentric *Smiley Smile* album and the criminally underappreciated *Wild Honey* just a few months later is, for the most part, some of the band's most daringly experimental and durable. The former's biggest selling point at the time was the abbreviated "Heroes and Villains," but it was the truly oddball tracks like the humorous "Vegetables," and the fragile "Wind Chimes" and "Wonderful," that gave it its lasting beauty. Comparatively, *Wild Honey*, with its songs co-written by Brian and **Mike Love**, and relying mainly on the lead vocals of **Carl Wilson**, found the group delving further into R&B rhythms and a somewhat tougher sound overall. The double-disc expanded edition features the first-ever stereo mix of *Wild Honey* (minus "Mama Says," which appears in the original mono mix) and a trove of previously unreleased session recordings, some of which shed light on the group's song-building process at the time, while others are largely disposable. It's filled in with various period live tracks and the first official release of the master tape of the aborted *Lei'd in Hawaii*, originally intended as a live album and ultimately redone in the studio before being abandoned altogether. Often bootlegged, there's little here to suggest that they made the wrong decision, although covers of The Box Tops' "The Letter" and Wayne Fontana and the Mindbenders' "Game of Love"—the latter reimagined as a soulful ballad with Brian on organ—serve as mildly interesting curiosities. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

Rush

A Farewell to Kings (40th Anniversary Edition) UME

For **Rush** fans, the future looks bleak: Drummer **Neil Peart** has teased his retirement in recent years, suggesting that the prog rock power-trio may now cease to exist. Realizing the group's most recent studio LP, 2012's *Clockwork Angels*, may be their last, Geddy-heads must say a farewell to kings and tearfully revisit 1977's *A Farewell to Kings*, their sweeping fifth LP—and the latest to receive a lavish 40th anniversary reissue. Only the top one percent of nerd-fans should spring for the Super Deluxe Edition, which, like most huge box sets, is padded with filler like a king's ring and a velvet pouch. Modern prog master **Steven Wilson** offers a nuanced spin with his 5.1 remix, but the standard album is cinematic enough as it is. *A Farewell to Kings* marked a critical step in Rush's evolution from an ambitious hard-rock band with prog presentation to a prog-rock band with a hard edge. By this point, Peart was a miniature percussion orchestra, having outfitted his already-massive kit with bells, chimes, tubular bells and temple blocks. Meanwhile, bassist **Geddy Lee** fully embraced synths and bass pedals, and **Alex Lifeson** expanded his palette to include classical and 12-string guitars. Their ambition had swelled, too, as evidenced by the ambient soundscapes of the "Xanadu" intro, the lush synth layers of ballad "Madrigal" and the conceptual sprawl of epic "Cygnus X-1." This reissue includes two discs of studio-quality live material from 1978, topped off with a handful of *Kings* covers from Rush disciples—including Canadian hard rock act **The Trews**, who add some unexpected heaviness and rasp to "Cinderella Man." ***Ryan Reed***

The Rolling Stones

On Air POLYDOR RECORDS/UME

Like every other popular British act of the early '60s, **The Rolling Stones** were often invited to appear on BBC Radio programs, an opportunity that they, as newcomers, happily accepted. On shows like "Saturday Club," "Top Gear," "Blues in Rhythm" and "The Joe Loss Pop Show," the classic 1960s lineup performed live in the BBC's studios, both promoting their current releases and grabbing tunes from their repertoire—most of them favored covers—that they had not included on singles or albums. There are 32 tracks on the two-disc deluxe edition of *On Air*, all of them dating from 1963–65, by which time, the band presumably no longer needed (or had time for) the radio exposure. The tracks are not arranged chronologically, so the first number, the Chuck Berry-penned "Come On," that marked the Stones' first single, is followed up by a 1965 "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction," making the evolution in the band—from R&B loyalists to forceful rockers with a growing arsenal of original material—evident. Berry's work shows up often ("Carol," "Memphis, Tennessee," "Around and Around," "Roll Over Beethoven" to name a few) and the Stones' masterful reworkings of other American soul and blues standards are consistently powerful. For the most part, the live alternate takes of officially released Stones tunes lack any major surprises—the aforementioned "Satisfaction" retains all of its thump and fuzz—but the real value is in the tunes that don't appear elsewhere, like Bo Diddley's "Cops and Robbers" and Buster Brown's "Fannie Mae," both played with reverence and grit. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

The Beatles

The Christmas Records

APPLE CORPS LTD./CAPITOL/UME

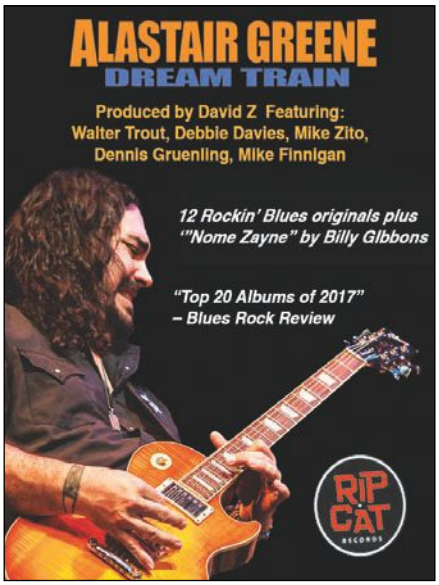
Regardless of how increasingly famous and overburdened they became, **The Beatles** dutifully recorded a Christmas message each year from 1963–69. Distributed to fan club members via flimsy flexi-discs, these seasonal audio missives were always festive and good-naturedly silly, but taken seriously by the band—the affection that they had for those who put them where they were shines through in each of the seven volumes. The Christmas recordings have never been officially reissued, and Capitol has done them justice, releasing the series on differently colored 7-inch vinyl singles, housed tidily in a box that also includes a 16-page booklet reproducing the fan club newsletters that accompanied each record. Ranging in length from nearly four minutes to just under eight, the recordings reflect the band's growth as artists and masters of the studio. The first, from 1963, mainly features the foursome cheekily summarizing the last year and thanking the fans, while the 1967 edition—coming as it does post-*Pepper*—dispenses with the small talk and delves head(s) first into the studio experimentalism then occupying The Beatles' brains. "Christmas Time (Is Here Again)," the theme of that year's recording, is chopped up into bits sandwiched between snippets of psychedelia and spoken word, playing off of then-current TV and radio programs. That the group had the run of the studio—encouraged wholeheartedly by their open-minded producer **George Martin**—is apparent by this point, so it is not surprising that the '68 gift sounds, at times, as if it were done the same day as "Revolution 9." On the final fan-club release, the way-out-there 1969 piece, **Yoko Ono** makes her way in—this seventh Christmas record is as different from the 1963–64 ones as "She Loves You" was from *Abbey Road*. You can tell, in retrospect, why it was their last. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

DEAD RELICS

Grateful Dead

Robert F. Kennedy Stadium, Washington, D.C., July 12 & 13, 1989 RHINO

The Grateful Dead were almost never bigger than in the summer of 1989 and, in particular, over the two July nights at Washington, D.C.'s RFK Stadium captured on a new 6-CD box set (plus tour-contextualizing liner notes by *Relix* editor **Dean Budnick**). It was true of the sextet's popularity, headlining the football arena alone for the first time, and it was true of the band's sound, revitalized by a generally healthy **Jerry Garcia**, mostly reassembled after a 1986 coma and preceding decade of heroin addiction. Largely, it was because the Dead had quietly achieved a stable lineup. A full pivot from the intimate jazz-touched psychedelia of the early '70s, the five-and-a-half hours from 1989 reveal a beautifully mixed vision of the band in the era of keyboardist **Brent Mydland** and veritably controlled by the two thundering drummers, locked in tight. Being 1989, there are echoing electronic snares ("Eyes of the World"), overly literal sound effects (stereo motorcycles on "Hell in a Bucket"), tepid **Bob Weir** blues rockers (his version of "Turn on Your Lovelight" sounds even more like an '80's beer ad than ever) and Mydland's sometimes uncomfortably misogynistic ad-libs (ditto). But, questionable choices aside, the band drives with a titanic power, all six musicians (plus occasional guest **Bruce Hornsby**) constantly improvising at once. Even during seemingly fixed songs, all simultaneously draw new shapes, fill in details and listen to each other. There are few big jams, so much as punctuating guitar sparkles, rhythmic tangents and moments of utter presence. An era perhaps better served by highlight reels, as always for latter-day Dead, the high-wire, all-in improv thrills of "Let It Grow" are an entrance point, both keynote and keyhole. ***Jesse Jarnow***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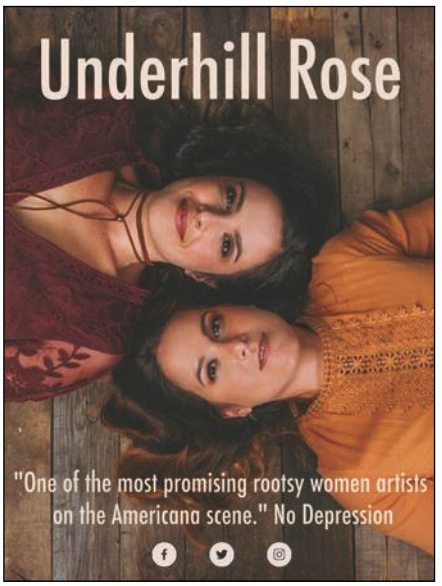
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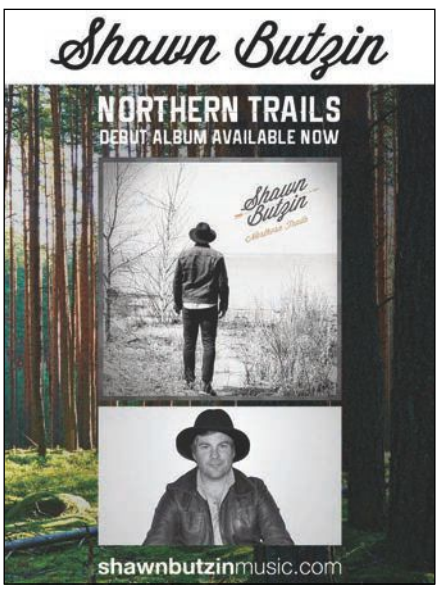
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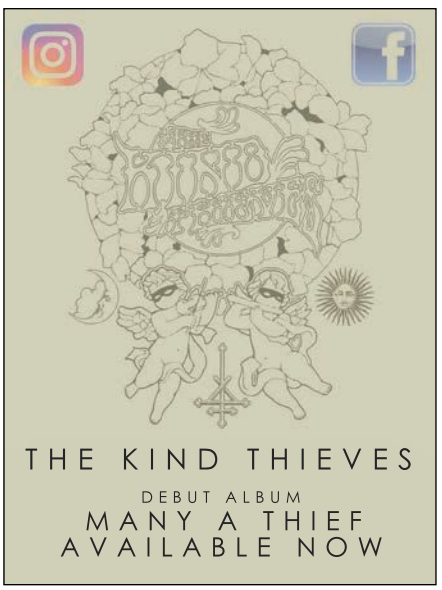
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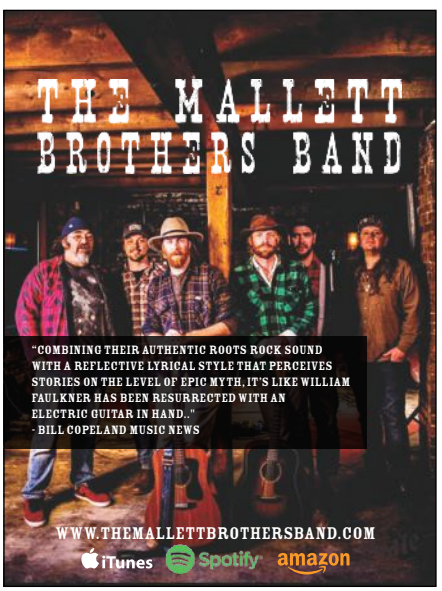
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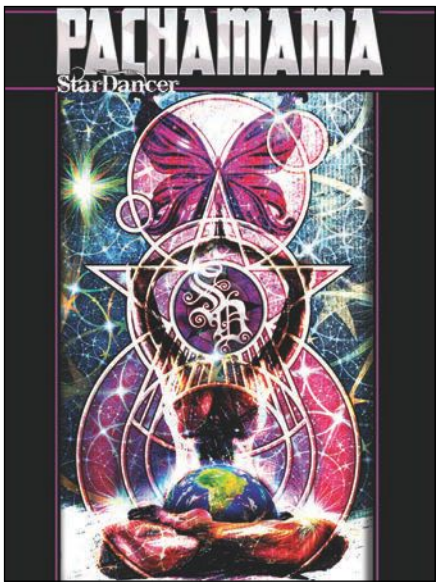

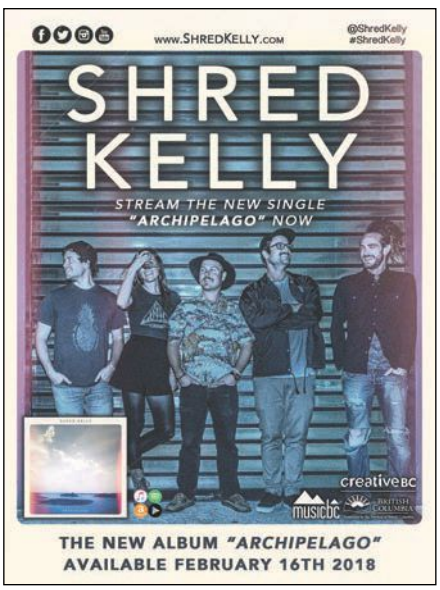

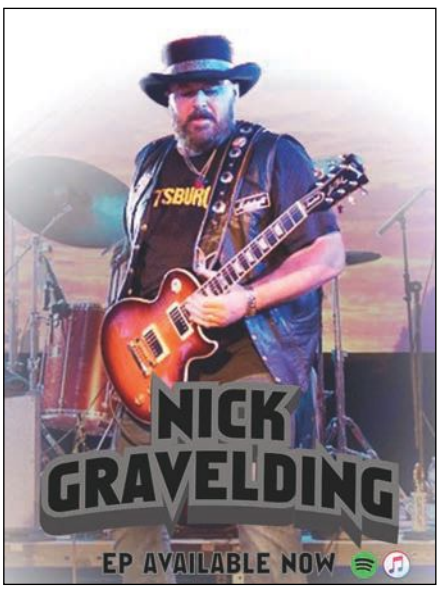

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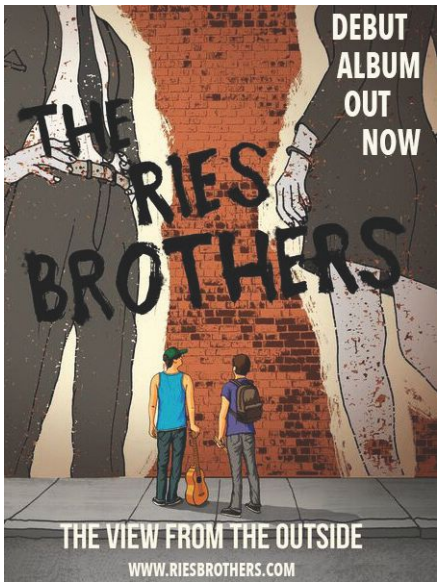
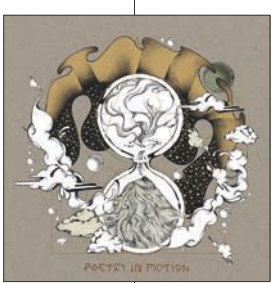


fed and rested after being hungry and tired and wet and cold, you go from unhappy to happy. There's this documentary, *I AM*, that's all about that. Humans think that's the secret to happiness: to have twice as much. It's the big lie of capitalism. Not that I'm inherently against capitalism, but it's a big trick. There's a gimmick to what we're doing in our day-to-day lives, and we all buy into it in some way or another. Even if you've figured out a bunch of stuff, we still sort of buy into this accumulation theory that never works. So the song is just breaking it down and asking, "What if it wasn't like that?"

FIRE IN THE SKY

"Fire in the Sky" was written when I was sitting in an airport and a member of the band lost someone. In the first verse, a person is very confused, like, "What the hell is all this for? We all just leave." The narrator starts to figure out that there's something to this—a pessimism of "What the hell is all of this for?" And then, in the chorus, he starts to be like, "Wait a minute. What is all of this *for*?" The seat that he's sitting in changes, but he's saying the same thing.



EVERYTHING TO ME

This song's about my dad. I lost him a few years back, and we were best friends. So I had all of these songs that were really sad about him. Every time I would finish one, I would think that it didn't feel right. And then, I wrote one that was really happy, and it felt right. So that's the song—missing him in a good way and telling him that I love him.

LIFE SUPPORT

While "Fire in the Sky" is saying the glass is half full, in "Life Support," it's half empty. "Life Support" suggests that we are a broken world. We operate in a way where we're like cancer, but not benign—we're malignant cancer. Benign cancer takes only what it needs, and you live with this little bump forever. But malignant cancer takes more than it needs, it kills you and then it dies. But it only had to take a little bit. "Life Support" is saying that's us. We're in the hospital, and we're not going to make it. It's dumb, what we're doing. We're taking too much.

BAD NEWS

We just had a really polarizing election. And it makes it very easy for any American, or anyone worldwide, to be like, "Oh, this is my side. This is where I stand." And it doesn't really matter who the president is. We learned that watching Obama; he was a genius and nothing happened. So, to me, all that stuff sounds like hype. The real issue is: Can people get along with each other? Can this country move in a good direction? Can we make sure that we are represented as Americans and as citizens of the world? Can we make sure that our government works for us? Now, the answer to all that stuff is "no." That's the only political song we did on the album. Normally, we do a ton, but politics just seems to be separating everyone now, which is way worse than who won the thing.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

That is Bobby Lee's song—he's had it for a while. We put it on an old record called *Stars & Stripes* and we've been playing it ever since. And all the guys in the band—Hellman especially—wrote all these crazy new parts, and it's just changed so much that we were like, "Hey, we've gotta put that thing on the record."

I met Bobby Lee in first grade. When I was seven, I moved to the states from Africa and I didn't know anybody. My parents were going through a divorce, and if you're a little kid, all that stuff is terrifying. I got into first grade and there was this one kid who was telling jokes the entire time, and the teacher made him turn his desk around. And I thought to myself: "I should know that guy;" and that was that. When we were about 13 or 14, we started doing talent shows in middle school. And then, by the time we went to high school, we were done with the talent shows and we wanted to start a band.

SING TO ME

"Sing to Me" was written for Trevor 'cause that guy's really in love with guitars—playing guitar, having guitars. That's his whole thing. So I wrote him a love song about a guitar. The point of the song is that, no matter how much I drop or break these things, it always just sings to me, which is probably the way some people feel about the person that they love. Maybe they're not always great to them, but this person has all of this love for them. When we were planning to figure out how to play it, I sang the first verse and then we were like, "Let's duet this thing." And then that was it.

I FOUND YOU

"I Found You" is the ending to the record. It's thanking all the fans and everyone who works behind the scenes. This has been amazing, and it's still going on and it's really cool.

title, which Kitchen Sink Comics published for seven issues.

In his introduction to a compilation of *Grateful Dead Comix* favorites, Garcia wrote, "The Grateful Dead has always been eclectic stylistically, and so are these comics, going from hard, illustrative styles to cartoony, comic-y, bouncy animated stuff. Being able to have that spread of styles is fun—I don't know that there's any absolute aesthetic to comics, just like music, and whether or not this material has any interest to anybody besides Deadheads I couldn't even begin to guess. It doesn't matter, really. For me, it's given me new covers to collect, and made me a happy fan—still a fan-addict after all these years."

Candelario's hand in creating the series later sparked an idea that led him directly to Marvel. Candelario had long been in charge of the band's backstage passes. He remembers that initially they were simply created by using stamps on felt, which, as it turned out, meant that they could be easily counterfeited by zealous Deadheads. By the mid-'80s, this prompted the band to produce a series of passes for every show with art that varied from night to night, often with ongoing visual themes such as old-time autos. He notes that early on, "I had Jerry and [artist] Rick Griffin on my team to look [at the proposed images] to tell me what was cool and what changes needed to be made."

As Candelario contemplated the series of illustrations that would appear on the band's passes in 1995, he came up with the idea of using Marvel characters. He approached the company, which assented. Candelario recalls that his initial point of contact was "The Man, himself'" (i.e. Stan Lee). The resulting passes featured images of Spider-Man, Iron Man, Thor, The Hulk, The Silver Surfer, Galactus, and, yes, even Captain America.

Just six years earlier, Cap had extolled the virtues of Deadheads. The question remains as to how this reference found its way into the pages of *Captain America*.

Mark Gruenwald, who wrote issues 355–357 in the middle of a 10-year run on the book, passed away in 1996 at age 43 due to a heart attack resulting from an undetected congenital defect.

Epic Marvel Podcast host Kurtis Findlay comments, "Mark Gruenwald was a fantastic writer who really understood the core of the characters that he wrote. He never relied on cheap gimmicks or publicity stunts to make his books sell. He was simply an excellent storyteller."

But was he a Deadhead?

The answer appears to be no. Gruenwald's editor on *Captain America* was his old friend Ralph Macchio (no, not the actor). A year after Macchio started at Marvel in 1976, he met Gruenwald, a comic fan who was then toiling at a Manhattan bank, and recommended him to the Marvel brass. The two of them soon became writing partners on *Marvel Two-In-One* and *Thor*, before later joining forces again on *Captain America* where Gruenwald penned the scripts and Macchio edited his work.

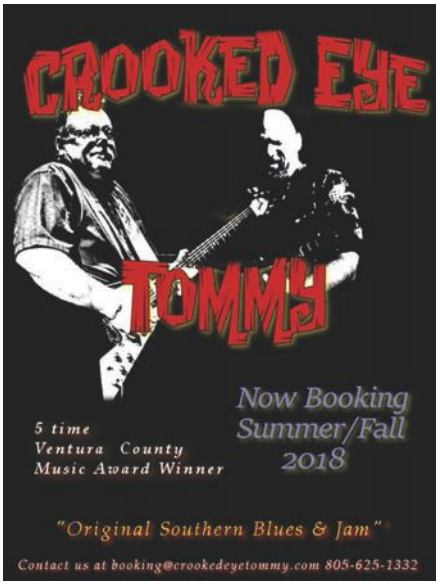
Macchio remembers Gruenwald as a casual music fan who kept a poster of The Who's *The Kids Are All Right* hanging in his office. Macchio also recalls that Gruenwald once informed him that John Lennon's death had helped convince him to get married because one doesn't know what's on the horizon (a poignant thought given Gruenwald's own fate).

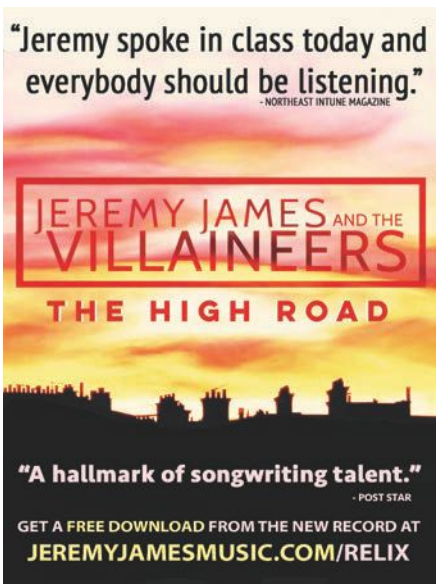
While Gruenwald did not demonstrate any particular fervor for the Grateful Dead, Macchio notes that Marvel did have at least one resident Deadhead, Mike Higgins, who served as an editor, letterer and in other capacities over the years. In issue No. 262 of *Fantastic Four* (January 1984), which came out during Marvel's whimsical Assistant Editor's Month, the comic opens with writer/penciller John Byrne on the phone with Higgins, explaining that his content is late because the FF hasn't called him yet to share their latest exploits. Higgins is receiving this call while seated behind his desk. The portion of his shirt that is visible features an unmistakable Stealie logo.

Macchio believes it's possible that Gruenwald included the reference to Grateful Dead fans in issue No. 357 as a nod to their friend Higgins.

Still, it could have just been a plot device, pure and simple. By the time that Gruenwald wrote these issues of *Captain America*, the nomadic nature of the band's fans was well established. It is possible that Gruenwald, who clearly had some musical interests, was simply referencing the band's affable, peripatetic boosters in order to serve his story of missing teens captured by super villains, and relocated to "a camp set up to fan the flames of hatred and promote the ways of violence."

All of which suggests that—whether in the pages of Captain America circa 1989 or in the polarized, tumultuous world of the present—"considering all the alternatives, this country could use a lot more Deadheads."

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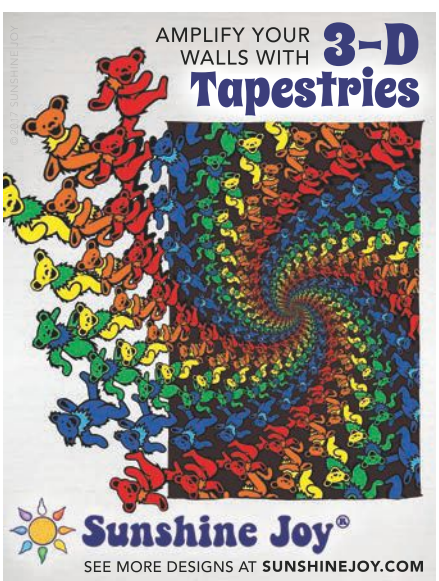

 Continued from page 39

one Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta—better known as Lady Gaga. She's credited with background vocals on "Carolina" and "Find Yourself." The latter tune is a song that's been in the band's repertoire for at least a few years.

"Bradley Cooper is doing [the film] *A Star Is Born*, which comes out in May, and when I played Desert Trip with Neil, Bradley was there," says Nelson. "He saw me playing and said, 'I want that guy to consult with me on how to be an authentic-looking rock star on the screen.' I met Lady Gaga though him and we became really good friends. She's an immense talent. She's the real deal. She came and saw one of my shows and became a fan of the songs 'Find Yourself' and 'Carolina,' so she sang on them. We wrote a bunch of music for the movie and I wrote a bunch on my own. I got my band to do the music and they ended up acting in the movie as well."

* * *

HOW, YOU MIGHT BE WONDERING, did the son of Willie Nelson find his way to fronting a rock band and hanging with the likes of Lady Gaga and Bradley Cooper? Simply by following his muse.

Born in Austin and raised in Maui, Lukas Autry Nelson realized at a young age that his situation was not like that of the other kids he knew. The move to Hawaii provided perspective. "Mom decided to raise us there, which was a great idea," he says. "Not as many people are obsessed with Willie Nelson there. They love him but, in Texas, it's a whole other deal. [In Hawaii], I was just a privileged kid. I went to a Montessori school, then a private school, then I was homeschooled for a couple of years. It was a pretty normal childhood, but I was traveling all the time and was never home for more than three months at a time, ever.

"I'm grateful for my mother's influence in my life because she made me work for everything that I've had and never spoiled me," he says. Growing up, Nelson struggled with what he calls "the 'why' of it all. Why is it that some of us are born with a lot and some of us are born with nothing?" He continues, "As a kid in a privileged upbringing, I had everything but I didn't understand the meaning of any of it. I wanted to understand more about the world. I wanted to understand about people who go through so much pain. I wanted to be a part of the world I was in. I really turned inward and started studying spirituality and all the different religions of the world, and figuring out what makes me tick on a human level."

Nelson' first dream was to be a fighter pilot, then an Olympic swimmer.

Promise of the Real

Eventually, music took hold. He wrote a song called "You Were It" that Willie recorded. That was when, Nelson says, "I felt that maybe this is what I'm supposed to do. I put all my effort toward playing guitar, playing music, and I put the same effort that an Olympic athlete would put toward doing [their sport]. I practiced all the time. I didn't have a girlfriend; I didn't have anything. At one point, I decided to leave the nest, so to speak, and I cut myself off from my parents financially. I don't take from them any more than they've already given me—from birthing me and raising me. It gives a lot of meaning to my life."

With the 2008 formation of Promise of the Real, whose very name comes from a line in Neil Young's 1974 song "Walk On"—"Sooner or later it all gets real"—Nelson's direction in life came into clearer focus. Now, he says, he's seeing tangible results. So is Willie. "I think they've got what they need," says the 84-year-old legend. "They have confidence, talent, and a love for the music and a love for the fans. There's a lot of great high-energy exchange out there when those boys play—a lot of positive energy going out from them—and the audience is throwing it back. I'm really proud."

"Hopefully, in the world that I'm trying to create for myself, this is just the very beginning," Lukas Nelson says. "It's baby steps. I feel that we're young and we've still got so much potential for more. Dad didn't make it until he was 40 years old and, even as a songwriter, he was struggling. I'm 29 and I think that if I just can keep working and honing my skills and keep putting in the practice and the effort, I know that it'll pay off somehow. It has paid off in so many ways and I'm very grateful for that; the joy of watching my art develop is the reward. And also, the joy of being able to do something I love for a living gives me a sense of deep meaning. I'm able to make other people happy at the same time I'm making myself happy. I really couldn't ask for anything more."

Jacob Blickenstaff

Beck performing at New York's Central Park SummerStage, 7/1/14

Bill Kelly

was something about the crappy-sounding mic and the first take where I wasn't trying to nail it. And we just left it. There are many memories from the '90s where I'd be recording a vocal and we'd all decide it was too poppy or too slick. Was that a good decision or bad? I don't know. We were going for something with more character rather than something that's like a laser shooting out of the speakers."

Colors, on the other hand, is one laser after another. It's a fucking Death Star. Beck and Kurstin powered through numerous songs before arriving at their final 10, but this "demolition derby" approach was also a bit different than usual. "It's a messy process," he admits. "With this record, each song was a dozen songs before we got to the final version. It's almost like each track is the greatest hits of all the ideas we wrote for that particular song. It's an interesting process. It was a discipline, but it was also liberating because it felt like nothing was precious. You could erase the chalkboard and start over. It was very freeing."

* * *

BECK REALIZES THAT MANY—OR EVEN most—songwriters would find that process agonizing. "I know some artists who work like, 'If it's not happening in two or three hours, I'm out,'" he says. "That's probably the smartest, most productive way to go about it. I tend to like a challenge, and if there's a song that's stubborn, I'll beat it to death. It's a fight to the finish. 'Colors' was like that. That song did not want to work. We went at it 100 different ways and, on the last record, there was a song called 'Waking Light' that didn't want to work. I tried so many angles—different melodies, lyrics and nothing was really happening. And finally, after persistence, something special happened. It's a little bit of a quandary: Could I have written 10 songs in the effort it took me to finish that one? Yeah, probably. But we persisted and pushed through, and we got it. At the end of the day, a song like 'Wow' or 'Dear Life' took no time at all, just hours. And people come to me and say, 'These are the songs I like.'

"Over the years, I've started to feel that people can hear if it's effortless," he continues. "So there is probably some wisdom to the approach to go with the things that you don't struggle with. But I grew up with this myth: I remember getting a Japanese bootleg in the early '90s of The Beatles' sessions for 'Strawberry Fields Forever' and some of the *Sgt. Pepper's* tracks. They were really struggling and tried 50 different versions. They didn't come up with this magical thing out of thin air. They explored and struggled and fought for it. There was a lot of legend around *Pet Sounds* growing up. You'd hear about *Rumours* or *Thriller* where they just pushed and pushed and were meticulous. Like Steely Dan [on 1977's 'Peg'], where they got five guitar players to play the same solo, just to get that magical moment. That was very influential for me—the process of not being afraid to struggle a bit and possibly come up empty-handed after all the effort."

That process—digging deep, polishing, perfecting—defines Beck's ethos in 2017.

"I've been in a mode in recent years where I want to hear something or see something that feels like a lot went into it," he says. "I suppose it's from the feeling that we live in a world where the computer programs used to make music, film or art allow you to do magical things with the press of a button, and not a lot of effort. What was a miracle 25 years ago is now kind of commonplace in music production. So I want to hear something that doesn't sound like I could have thrown it together on my laptop. If it's a painting, not some free-form, abstract composition, I want something that looks like it took two years to paint with meticulous detail and complexity. That's just what I've been drawn to recently.

"We're in a period now where, suddenly, a lot of art-making and filmmaking is little bit facile," he adds. "You can press a button and make it look like there's some kind of incredible special effect. If I were a filmmaker right now, I'd be trying to make something like [director/choreographer] Busby Berkeley. If I were a Wes Anderson or Spike Jonze—one of my contemporaries—I'd be trying to make something elaborate, choreographed, set-designed, meticulously built, with camera work that couldn't be done with computer-generated imagery."

Beck's artistic objectives are in constant flux. It's hard to believe that the same man recorded both the warped lo-fi folk-noise of 1994's *One Foot in the Grave* and the glimmering post-modern pop of *Colors*, or that the smiling, grateful gent at the 2015 Grammys once sarcastically deadpanned on MTV that earning the breakout success of "Loser" was "like surfing in some oil spillage." But looking back, he can draw a straight line through these zig-zagging career shifts.

"I'll occasionally see an old photo of me and the guys in my band and think, 'Whoa, we look different,'" he says. "But the way it feels, subjectively, is very close. It almost feels like that restaurant that closed 10 years ago is there. It feels like I could get in my car and go there. That's what a lot of my past feels like. It feels like I could reach out and touch it. It doesn't feel like some foggy, distant place.

"For me, it's always been about creativity," he sums up. "I was making music for at least five or six years before I had anybody interested in recording me. And I've sort of wondered what that alternate version of my life would have been like [without commercial success]—if there weren't the distractions of having to go on big tours and put bands together and do TV shows and travel all over the place. I would probably be off making art, exploring. I do think about that. Occasionally, I'll be at an art show or reading an article, and I'll remember that some of the great artists in history were unknown in their lifetimes. In their modest existence, they created a whole world. It got deeper and deeper, and richer and richer."

ROB DERHAK

By DEAN BUDNICK

MOE. BASSIST ROB Derhak learned of his nasopharyngeal cancer during a band conference call in mid-July. He clicked over to speak with his doctor, who was reporting test results after a lymph node had been removed from his neck, and received the startling news.

"I got off the phone with her and I went back to the band call, and I just sat there listening to them talk," Derhak recalls. "I was in shock. It was an hour of me sitting there listening and just being out of it. I went through the whole meeting and then I was like, 'Look guys...'"

At the end of July, moe. announced that other than three upcoming dates, "We will be closing our doors until further notice."

In short order, the Maine resident began traveling to Boston for chemotherapy and radiation treatment. Three months later, on November 29, Derhak reported on Facebook that "Although I'll need to continue the Dr.'s visits for the next five years, they've given me a clean bill of health and declared me cancer-free, with only a minimal chance that it will return."

However, Derhak is still on the mend. "Due to the chemo, I've lost part of my hearing," he explains. "I also get ringing that hasn't gone away. Hopefully, it'll clear, but it doesn't always."

Though the cancer was located at the base of his nose rather than his larynx, as the doctors initially suspected, there was some concern as to whether the medical procedure might impact his voice. "You're talking about a centimeter away from where it would be," the bassist says. "So the treatment was all in my throat and the face area. It still beat the shit out of my throat, but it's gonna be OK. Right now, I have a little less range and my voice has a different timbre to it, although I haven't sat behind a microphone and belted it out like I would normally do."

Derhak is slated to rejoin moe. when they end their brief hiatus with shows at The Capitol Theatre in Port Chester, N.Y., on February 2 and 3.

Outside of the moe. world, you're something of a private person. Was it difficult for you to make this announcement about your health?
I have my music persona, but I'm a different person at home. I have a life here in Maine and I have other friends who aren't in the world of music at all. The thing that I struggled with the most, when I was about to announce it, was that it's not just the moe. fans who are gonna know. It was going to affect my kids. I just felt really feeble. In a way, I was almost embarrassed, but I knew that I had to say something because I had no choice about doing it.

But then the response that I got about it—I couldn't believe it. It was a rough year for me, starting with my mom passing away in January, and just seeing how people came together made me feel really good. So many people were generous in a way that not only helped me, but I think might have helped them.

Despite your relative anonymity, looking back over the years, can you talk about a particular moment when someone realized your secret identity?
I was a lacrosse player in high school and then I picked it up again, maybe like nine or 10 years ago. I started playing with a men's league, and I was at a tournament in Lake Placid

Paul Citone

one time. I had a moe. sticker on the back of my helmet and the defensemen that was on me said, "Hey, cool sticker, I love that band. They're my favorite. Anyone ever tell you that you kind of look like the bass player?" And I was like, "Yeah, 'cause I am him." Then he started flipping out. Their team was beating the shit out of us, so he said, "Look, I'll let you shoot. If you get the ball I'll stay off you and let you take the shot." I told him, "I don't need any help, dude," but when I did get the ball he wouldn't play me—he just stepped off of me. So I just ripped a shot from way far away. It was kind of funny.

Before a recent New York show, you took to Facebook and had some strong words for fans about not buying tickets on the secondary market. [Derhak wrote: "I implore you guys to not buy those tickets. Fuck those guys! If you missed out, just catch us the next time around."] Had that been on your mind for a while?
I just reacted without giving it much thought. I was pissed that the tickets were gone and that these people were sort of capitalizing on that. I thought it was absurd, and it still pisses me off. I don't think there should be an industry based on scamming tickets. It was a frustrating thing to see; I didn't like it and I spoke my piece.

When moe. performed with Phil lesh at Lockn', you watched from home. What was that experience like?
When we had to cancel a bunch of stuff, it was a struggle for me personally because we have employees and the guys in the band have families to take care of. I had told them: "You may want to consider keeping a couple of these shows, and I'll talk to some other bass players who will come in and cover for me." But nobody felt right about that. I was like, "At the very least, still do the show with Phil" because I wasn't planning on playing anyhow.

The way we originally planned it out, I was going to play the moe. set beforehand, but then, it didn't make sense to have two bass players. So I thought it would be really cool to go out in the audience and watch moe. play. It would be like this dream I've had of seeing the band play live, which is impossible because I'm in the band. This was going to be the closest that I would ever get to doing that.

As it turned out, I watched it in my basement on the widescreen while it was happening, which was still pretty freaking cool.

Did you know that Bobby [Weir] was going to wear a "rob." shirt?
I had no idea. I ended up texting him and thanking him. He was really supportive, really worried about me, and he kept in touch. I knew he was a nice guy, but I didn't know he was that nice.

UPCOMING SHOWS IN: LAS VEGAS

JAN 17	G3 2018	FT. JOE SATRIANI, JOHN PETRUCCI (DREAM THEATER), PHIL COLLEN (DEF LEPPARD)
FEB 9	STICK FIGURE WITH TWIDDLE & IYA TERRA	
FEB 13	LETTUCE	
FEB 22	DARK STAR ORCHESTRA	
MAR 27	GALACTIC	
MAY 14	PETER HOOK & THE LIGHT	

UPCOMING SHOWS IN: NEW YORK

JAN 11 + 12	SAN FERMIN	
JAN 18	COLLIE BUDDZ	"GOOD LIFE" EAST COAST TOUR
JAN 26 + 27	G. LOVE & SPECIAL SAUCE	
FEB 1	GIANT PANDA GUERILLA DUB SQUAD	
FEB 14 + 15	THE WAILERS	
FEB 16 + 17	ANTIBALAS	

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